black sheep, come home

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black sheep, come home

by fluffy_papaya, iamsolarflare

Summary

Hello again, friend of a friend...
--
Legundo's involuntary trip through the multiverse has landed him in all sorts of predicaments, worlds with hidden dangers or unobvious threats. One thing has been constant, though - he has always been *alone,* with the exception of the ghosts of his past that h(a)unt him.

Technically, that hasn't changed. It's just gotten infinitely more obvious and infinitely less easy to negotiate with. With Legundo's usual ever-present time limit bearing down on both him and this new unknown, things seem set to unravel... whether or not anyone wants them to.

Notes

black sheep, come home has been a huge passion project of ours for the past full year, and while it's nowhere near completion at time of writing this note, we're incredibly excited to share it with you anyway! We'll be updating weekly (potentially biweekly) until either we run out of chapters or the work itself is done.

bsch's chapter art is drawn by Fluffy itself. Chapters were beta'd by ThaneZain and Leontids -- we thank them deeply for their support on this absolute behemoth of a story!

Please heed content warnings and disclaimers carefully if this is your first time here, and we hope you enjoy!

Chapter 1: [Disclaimers]

Chapter Summary

But first, a few administrative notes.

On ratings:

bsch contains no suggestive content, no cursing, and relatively little described gore in the traditional sense, but does contain moderately described violence in a more realistic setting than a typical Minecraft video. It also contains a substantial amount of both canon-typical and canon-atypical horror elements, including a good deal of fantastical body horror; the 100 Days Multiverse is already a series that contains some aspects of horror storytelling, but this fic was written by authors who really like Weird Horror and that definitely shows.

In other words, this fic is marked as Mature to err on the side of caution (and the same goes for its having the *Graphic Depictions Of Violence* tag). It's really more of a TV-16 situation than anything else, but AO3 goes straight from T to M, and I'm going to be blunt – I don't think 13 year olds should read this fic casually. Or 14 year olds. Or most 15 year olds for that matter. That said, if you're reading this and that isn't you, I'm trusting your discretion here; it'll get at least a little bit spooky, so please take proper care to make sure you're in the right mindset for whatever you're going to read. Check the work tags, check the individual chapter content warnings (marked with a ▶), ask a friend to skim for you if you're really unsure – whatever you need to do to take care of yourself.

And seriously, if you're 14 or younger you *really* should not be reading this. If you're a particularly macabre kid and you love horror, might I suggest you read Goosebumps or maybe some old fairy tales? You can come back to this later. It'll be here. We won't judge.

On canonicity:

bsch is a fanfiction written about a work of fiction that, as of yet, has not reached completion and has sizable gaps in understanding for a variety of different aspects of canon. Because this is a complete work with an arc, it necessitates making some assumptions *about* that canon, and possibly even alterations to the known canon.

In some cases, this may mean it lines up uncannily well with plot points that were not known at time of writing. In other cases, this may mean it comes off as hilariously incongruous with newer elements of the canon. Either way, we're not here to predict the way the story is going; we're here to tell a story of our own. It doesn't matter if we're right or wrong about something – this fic is a crossover, it's not exactly looking to line up with canon and is *especially* not looking to take its place.

This is *also* to say – please don't let this define fanon! If you disagree with interpretations here, we encourage you to create new ones of your own – in fact, even if you *agree* with interpretations here, we'd love for there to be more disparate ones! Also if you start claiming things are canon to 100DMV solely because they happen in this fic, I'm going to fight you, sorryyyyy <3

On visibility:

This is a small fandom and it's fairly inevitable that one or both of the MCYTers in this fic will eventually stumble across it – and in order to prevent this from happening, we'd essentially have to cut off a good portion of the fandom from ever discovering it. That said, we'd prefer this process not be sped along, or eclipse other discussion topics in public. Please do not bring up this fic in stream chats or video comments unless it is explicitly mentioned for some reason, and please do not directly ping or otherwise attempt to directly show this to those MCYTers on Tumblr, Twitter, Discord, or any other social media. There's a thread for this story in the off-topic forum section of Legundo's Discord; consider it a containment chamber and a venue for being informed of fic updates.

If you *are* Legundo or Viking, or any number of Legundo's editors/ VAs/et cetera (hello, Sierra!), the same rules generally apply; we ask that you keep discussion of this fic out of videos, and would prefer less detailed discussion of it onstream and on social media (Tumblr doesn't count here, it's hardly public-facing). In addition, the above disclaimers still very much apply; please curate your own experiences accordingly, and understand that *bsch* was created by fans, for fans, and accordingly treats the characters within as characters completely separate from their actors.

We don't expect this to be a particularly serious issue, or even to require the level of gravitas with which this disclaimer was written; however, we've seen these things happen *and worse* in other fandoms,

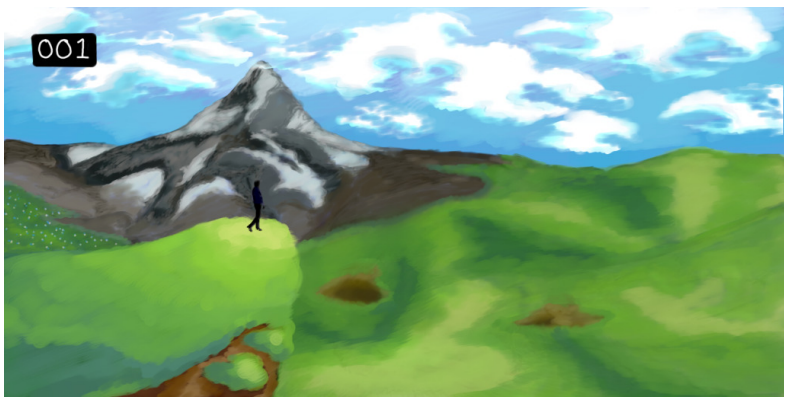
so we've chosen once more to err on the side of caution.

On a more positive note – if you want to talk about *bsch* in more detail, especially about things you enjoyed, AO3 *does* have the option to leave a comment as a guest, which has been left enabled on this fic. As the entry form states, whatever email address you leave will not be published and is essentially only used to notify people if their comments are replied to.

Chapter 2: 001

Chapter Summary

As always, this story begins with paranoia – with the impending feeling of surveillance.



Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

None.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Legundo lands on his feet.

He always lands on his feet when he enters a new world – half luck, half refusal to stumble. Staying steady is integral not just to his continued survival, but to his continued identity, and also (of course) luck-wise, the last thing he wants to do is pitch feet-first onto a hard surface. Makes for a bad first impression to the world.

He takes a step onto the grass, staring out at the world he's found himself in. Normally his legs still feel a little unsteady from some unwilling jump or another, but everything feels rather *solid* this time.

There's usually a shift in the air around now. Something to tell him this place is just a little *off,* a little different from the place he used to call home, but… nothing. He doesn't *feel* any different, he can't spot any weird structures or new blocks, the environment around him

seems like a bog-standard plains biome – everything's *normal.*

Maybe this is a case where things unravel over time, he thinks, and then grimaces, because those are *never* fun worlds to be in. Those tend to be absolute nightmare scenarios to deal with in the best possible cases, and the last time something like that happened –

"Legundo! Hey, bud–"

The unfamiliar voice comes from no more than a *block* to the left of him, and Legundo *immediately* backpedals, instinctively trying to shove the person away with a wide sweep of both his hands. The voice makes an *ack!* noise in surprise, but he doesn't feel his hands hit anything solid –

"Woah, woah *woah!* Hey! *Chill!* It's just me!"

– because there's nothing there. He's staring right towards where the source of the noise should be, and there is absolutely nothing there. He grimaces, digs one heel into the dirt and braces himself to turn and sprint in the other direction at the slightest sign of trouble.

The voice, however, seems – if not *unaware* of his reaction, at least *very* confused by it. *"Legs?"* they say, drawing out the vowel slightly shakily. "C'mon, man, don't you recognize me?"

Legundo takes a deep breath in and stomps down on the little survival instinct part of his brain labeling the voice as *instant threat, avoid now.* "You're a disembodied voice," he says, as mildly as he can manage given the absolute state of the situation. "There's not really much to recognize."

"I am *not–"* the voice pauses, like they're just now realizing they're invisible– "Aw, *seriously? Again???"*

Okay. *Great.* As he's suspected, this is one of those worlds where things unravel, and the *twist* this time around must be that he's got some sort of invisible stalker, who will presumably begin hunting him immediately after whatever grace period he currently has ends. He ignores the voice going off on a tangent – something about them being invisible, not his problem – and scans the horizon.

Nothing. No suspicious obsidian monoliths or crashed meteors or anything else that would indicate Decem's presence. It'd be enough to suspect that they're not present here at *all* yet, if not for the disembodied voice that knows him.

“Uh… Legs? Legs, buddy? You look a bit spaced-out, you good there?”

Legundo considers his options – *who sent you* might be tipping his hand a little too much to start off with, *who are you* would reveal to the voice that, despite their familiarity towards him, he doesn’t know who they are. Which is weird, really, because they sound… incongruously cheerful, considering the situation. Upbeat and friendly, like they’re greeting someone they’re on good terms with. Not a hint of any sort of serious cadence, which… probably rules out Decem directly. Doesn’t rule out the possibility that the voice is one of their pawns, of course, but that’s a problem he’ll have to figure out later.

“What are you doing here, exactly?” Legundo settles on, taking a step back away and towards a tree, enough that it *could* look like he’s just angling towards getting basic resources instead of trying to create more distance between himself and the voice.

They scoff. “Dude. It’s fine, you can multitask and chop wood or whatever while we shoot the breeze.”

Hook, line, and sinker. Or at the very least someone who’s not calling attention to his vague tactical retreat motions.

“I, uh,” the voice continues, “was actually kinda hoping *you’d* tell me why I’m here? Since you know a lot of things I don’t, and to be honest I just kinda… woke up here? No idea what caused it.”

Great. They’re either lying, or something really weird is going on. Legundo isn’t a fan of *either* of those possibilities – doubly so because the voice hasn’t really changed from their confused and cheerful cadence, like they’re happy to see Legundo. And *that* means if they’re lying, they’re a *very good* liar, which is *bad* news as far as he’s concerned.

He’s leaving too long in between his responses anyways. Might as well have the excuse of physical labor. He shrugs and starts punching the tree nearest to him. “This is my next world, I guess.” Pause. Consider the next options. “Though, speaking of which, how long have you been here? Anything weird I should check out?”

“You’re gonna have to be a bit more specific than that, ‘Gundo,” the voice says, approaching… closer on his right side, he’s pretty sure.

“Any big towers or something like that? Probably made of obsidian?”

The voice hums thoughtfully. “What, like, the big pillars in the End

with the crystals on top of them? Unless there's been *another* apocalypse I can't think of any reason why they'd be in the overworld."

"Hm." Legundo considers this, and then decides to file that *apocalypse* bit away for later. "No blackstone tower-looking things either?"

The voice snorts. *"Naahhh.* If I saw a bastion in the overworld I'd have opened up the conversation with, like, 'hey Legs, did you know your folks are in the overworld for some reason, what's the deal with that?' or something."

Legundo tosses one of the oak logs from hand to hand as he waits for the leaves on the tree to decay. A few blocks away, another tree starts mysteriously losing logs, which he can only assume is the doing of the disembodied voice. "Mm. Sure."

"…Sure?" An odd note of skepticism creeps into the voice's tone, just *barely* audible. That's not great – it means he's said something wrong, or at least something suspicious enough that they've picked up on it.

He turns around and breaks down a log into planks, sets those planks together to make a crafting table, a series of practiced motions that *should* hide the slight tension in his shoulders under the guise of physical effort. "Yeah, sure," he says, and moves the conversation onwards before the voice can question it. "Anyway, if you see any blackstone or obsidian pillars, especially anywhere you're planning on settling down, just… start going in the opposite direction of them, alright?

"Towers, avoid, gotcha," the voice says. "And if I see a piglin?"

Legundo scrunches up his face in thought at the weird question. "As in a zombie piglin? You leave it alone or kill it, I guess? Not really any need to do anything different."

The voice goes silent. There's a second where Legundo assumes it's just them not having any questions to ask, but then the silence starts to stretch on, which is *not* good when there's an invisible person around that still *might* want him dead. He twirls the wooden axe in his hand (makes sense to have it first, just in case he needs to defend himself) and waits for any indication of where they went or what they're doing.

"Hm," the voice finally says, and Legundo can hear faint footsteps on the grass around him. He's being circled – though their voice doesn't

really sound *menacing* so much as it's thoughtful, curious, and maybe a little bit concerned. "Okay, so, you're not wearing any gold, your shirt's the wrong color, you've got glasses on, and you don't have little tusk-looking canines – I think I mistook you for someone else!"

There's just a *tiny* sliver of embarrassed panic in the voice's tone. "Man, sorry about that – just tell me first thing off the bat that I've got you mixed up with someone else, alright? I must've just sounded like an *idiot* there." They laugh, mostly sheepishly.

Legundo is *incredibly* tempted to start swinging right now – his hands close around the handle of the axe and he drives it into the next tree nearest to him with a little more force than might've been necessary. Even though it doesn't *feel* like the voice is lying, they *have* to be – they know his name, after all. They'd opened the conversation with it. That means they are in fact a very good liar. Bad sign, that.

"Uh," the voice says, and he realizes that he'd hit the tree with *definitely* too much force, "you good there, bud?"

Alright. Time to consider his options here. One, he could directly confront the disembodied voice about the fact that it is lying to him, which, *hey,* might not be the safest idea. Would get to the heart of the problem, but potentially at the cost of getting attacked. Option two, the one run by his paranoia, is continuing to keep an eye on the world around him. Sure, nothing seems out of shape or feels particularly weird (other than the voice's presence), but night hasn't fallen yet. Could be a chance something's wrong *there,* but Legundo doesn't want to be caught outside at night even if it *is* normal. Option three is to keep cutting wood and keep the voice talking without letting on that he knows something's wrong.

"Yeah, all good," he calls back to the voice, after what is *definitely* too long of a pause, but at this point he's hoping they just assume that he talks slowly. "Just – thinking."

"Dangerous pastime," the voice says – is that a *hint* of a snide drawl in there, or was that just his imagination? "What about?"

"Shelter, mostly," Legundo says, and finishes cutting down his fourth tree. "Shelter, and finding wool for a bed."

The voice snickers. "Guess it's not *that* dangerous of a pastime if you're gonna be practical about it. Alright, you keep cutting wood, I'll scout for a place."

Oh, that's… that's a situation Legundo doesn't really like. It's logical, but also it means he's letting the invisible voice just go wandering off *wherever* with absolutely zero indicator as to which direction they could end up coming from. Still, he can't exactly try to switch their jobs around when *he's* the one with the axe, so he's all but dug his own grave here.

"Let me know if you find anything interesting," Legundo says, tone maybe a *bit* too flat.

The voice doesn't really seem to notice, or at the very least doesn't react. "Alright," they chirp, "back in a bit, Leg– uh, buddy!"

Legundo just grits his teeth and keeps chopping, and the voice appears to take that as their cue to leave. He can only *assume* that they're actually gone and not just spying on him, but he won't really know either way until they're back.

…And then maybe by the time they come back, the twist will have started and they'll be trying to kill him.

Legundo groans and starts massaging at the headache threatening to build at his temple. He hates not knowing what's happening, and he's got this sinking feeling that there aren't going to be any clues anytime soon. Sure, he's survived worse, but that doesn't mean he has to *like* it.

About a stack of logs later (the last few of which he's had to cut down by hand), Legundo tucks the materials into his inventory and glances around. The voice hasn't come back yet, and he doesn't exactly know which direction they went anyway; even if he *were* able to decide whether it'd be best to follow them or to run away as quickly as possible, he'd have no idea which way to go.

Either way, making basic tools won't hurt anything. He digs down under the grass – he just needs… what, sixteen cobblestone? Eight for a furnace, three for a pickaxe, two for a sword, and another three for a stone axe *just in case.* Mercifully, there are no large sinkholes directly beneath him, and he manages to get what he needs with no incident.

By now, it's around noon judging by where the sun is in the sky, and there's still no sign of the voice. Legundo considers his options, shrugs, and then starts heading northwards – no point looking around for an invisible presence that may or may not be able to find him whenever they want, especially since he just deals with that on the regular anyway. If the voice wants to catch up to him, they can. If not, or they can't find him? Sucks for them. Great for him.

He pauses for a second to look at his comm and check his Y level – and a good thing, too. Apparently, this area's pretty high above sea level, meaning there's probably some cliffs around here somewhere – and the last thing Legundo wants to do is fall off a cliff and make things easy for his usual stalkers and/or the voice.

Legundo clenches the *just-in-case* axe in one hand, justifying it to himself by turning towards the small herd of sheep just to his right and eliminating only exactly as many of them as he needs. Now, with wool in his inventory, all he needs to find is a good place to set up a home base and build a quick shelter – nothing fancy, just a place to skip the night. The axe still doesn't leave his hand, but he's able to at least force himself to loosen his grip on its hilt as he comes to the top of the hill.

…Some views deserve a moment of silence. This is absolutely one such view – ice-capped mountains to one side, a small sheer cliff overlooking a large, mostly flat valley. It's pretty enough that the usual nervous spike in his gut subsides for just a moment.

"Pretty cool, right?" comes a voice from directly to his left.

Legundo successfully stops himself from full-body flinching at the scare, but he can't help but jump a little. The voice is back, and they're standing *way* closer now.

They snicker at his reaction. "Came lookin' for you," they say, as if that explains why they're standing so close. "So! I found us a *nice* spot, yeah? We got views, we got resources. Pretty sure there's a ravine cut into the mountain as well!"

"It'll work," Legundo says, looking to the side. Unfortunately, there's still nothing to tell him where the voice is; no matter how carefully he checks the air, there's not even the slightest bit of displacement to locate them by. He goes back to looking out over the valley, scanning the landscape until his eyes catch on a spot that'll work – there's a flat bit of land in the hills partially in the shade of the cliff that's just the perfect size for a small house with some room for expansion.

Legundo starts walking towards the clearing, and the voice starts following behind him, which is worrying, and also *talking,* which might actually be worse.

"So! Buddy, can't help but notice you're in a *hardcore* world," they say, drawing out their vowels just *slightly* too long. "Dangerous. Risky! I *like* it. Your usual scene?"

There's something that throws him about the way that the voice talks – it's spontaneous and jittery, jumping from sentence to sentence without giving him time to take most of it in. It's an unfamiliar enough way of talking that, despite his usual numbness towards weird situations, it's starting to get under Legundo's skin.

He focuses on answering the question instead in an attempt to not seem *too* unsettled. "You could say that," he says. Simple answer. Open and shut. No room for argument.

The voice seems to think otherwise. "You *could* say that?" they say in a tone of voice that makes it very clear they're raising their eyebrows at him. "As in, you could also *not* say that?"

Legundo idly spins the axe in his hand – not as a threat, not yet, but enough that it'll draw their eyes. "As in you could say that." He hops down from a more reasonable, less sheer ledge, and listens – but there's no sound of the voice dropping down, nor any displacement in the grass that would give them away.

"Or you *couldn't* say that," the voice says, now on the other side of him, and oh, yeah, Legundo can *tell* there's an awful little grin on their invisible face. "So, which one is it?"

He spins the axe again as he approaches the clearing, a motion which is starting to become an idle fidget by now. There's a little more space there than he'd accounted for when he'd been looking down at it, meaning there's some spots covered by the cliff he'll have to light up more or less ASAP – but, luckily enough, there's *also* some coal embedded into the cliffside, so that shouldn't be too much of a problem.

Instead of answering them, Legundo decides to just start work on a place to stay – he throws down his crafting bench, splits the logs into planks, and starts to build the small outline of a house, around 10 blocks across in each direction. The voice huffs, clearly annoyed at being brushed off, but they don't continue to press the issue, which gives him plenty of time to think. Time enough, in fact, that once he's gotten the first layer done, he's made up his mind about what to tell them.

If the voice is the twist, they already know what's happening, and nothing Legundo says to them will put him in any *more* danger. If the voice *isn't* the twist (which he seriously doubts, to be honest) it won't hurt to give his qualifications. Either way, he's ready to get

introductions over and done with.

“My name’s Legundo,” he says, straightening up and tucking the planks into his inventory. He pulls out the axe and peels the bark from the support beams he’s already partially built up. “And yeah, the hardcore worlds are my usual scene, considering it’s about the only thing I can do.”

“Huh.” Their tone is weirdly unreadable considering they’ve been mostly an open book until now. “Well, guess it’s back to calling you Legs, then. So! What’re we doing here, Legs?”

Something feels weird about that question, something Legundo can’t quite put his finger on. He elects to ignore that feeling for the time being – it’s not like he can do anything about it without knowing what it is, after all.

“We survive,” he says, shrugging. Is it unhelpful? Yes, absolutely, and in this case it’s on purpose. The less he reveals about what he knows of his situation, the better – if the voice is some sort of sleeper agent, he does *not* want to risk saying some kind of activation phrase.

The voices makes a dismissive noise, and Legundo stares at the walls as a second layer of planks begin to go up. They’re being placed along the outline of the first level, with two fence posts placed into empty slots to function as rudimentary windows. Conveniently enough, this also gives him a good idea of where the voice is standing – he waits until he’s certain he can tell where they are, and then looks directly at them.

“So what am I supposed to call you?”

The voice snickers. The third layer of the walls start to be placed, and Legundo watches as a flat slab roof starts to bridge over to him.

“Not quite picturing me tall enough, Legs,” they chirp as they begin to fill in the roof. “And as for a name - I don’t think we’re *quite* there yet, are we?”

They’ve got him there – Legundo can’t press that, not without sounding suspicious as all hell. He just shrugs again, kicking the stripped bark away with his foot and cutting out a frame for a door. Given that the day’s starting to move from late afternoon to early evening, he’s not going to have time to finish the floor – grass will have to do. With that unfortunate concession made, he ducks inside to reach the crafting bench.

He leaves the voice to finish building the roof and heads over to the cliffside to break in his stone pickaxe on some coal. He's already got a few sticks in his inventory, so it's quick enough work to set out a few torches, enough to light up the area under the cliff and hopefully keep things from spawning during the day at the very least. With that done, Legundo glances around outside one last time, completely unsure what he's looking for at this point, and then ducks into the house.

Bed. Torch. As an afterthought, Legundo makes a stair and places it on the other side of the house so that it faces out towards the window. The door swings open, and for a few seconds he's got a good handle on where the voice is before they shut the door behind them.

"Cozy," they say, tossing a chunk of stairs and slabs onto the bed. "Is that chair for me?"

Legundo shrugs. "Better than sitting on the ground."

The voice hums, drifting over to the other side of the house. There's a rhythmic tapping noise, and the stair plops into item form a few seconds later before being scooped up by invisible hands. "Aww. I appreciate it, buddy."

Legundo scoops up the blocks and falls sideways onto the bed, staring out into the rest of the house. He waits for the stair to be placed down again for several seconds, then rolls over onto his back as he realizes that's not going to happen.

"Yeah," he says, "no problem." It's absolutely a problem, of course, but it's not a good idea to say that out loud.

"You gonna call it a night, then?" the voice asks, tone casual and light.

Legundo considers this. It's only day one. If they're *really* here to try and kill him or otherwise mess with him, it probably won't be immediate, or at least not immediately deadly. He doesn't exactly *like* the idea of the voice watching him sleep, but… well, he doesn't exactly have the ability to do anything about it.

"Yeah," he says, setting his glasses on the crafting table nearby and lifting his arm over his eyes. "Don't want to start spawning phantoms this early in."

The voice snickers, and he's not entirely sure why. "Sure," they say, "of *course* not. Well, I'll try and grab some extra stuff for us in the

meantime. Sleep well, Legs.”

The door opens and shuts, and Legundo sighs heavily.

“Not likely,” he mutters under his breath.

Chapter End Notes

Solar's note: IT'S FINALLY HAPPENING AAAAAAAAAAA. i got tired of waiting to finish the entire thing before publishing so! we're posting weekly! maybe biweekly! enjoy!

also, yes, that's weekly and not daily because dog door was a freak alignment of the planets and i truly do not believe that type of writing energy is possessing me again anytime soon. that's okay, though -- this fic cooks slowly.

Chapter 3: 002

Chapter Summary

The duality of people, in more ways than one.

Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Brief description of a nonhuman creature being killed bare-handed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Legundo wakes up with a start, heart pounding in his chest.

Not that he remembers *why,* of course. That'd actually be *helpful* if he was able to remember his dreams other than the vaguest flickers of eyes, crying obsidian, and bright light. All he knows is that it feels like he's run a death sprint in his sleep.

He fumbles for his glasses, eyes still half closed, smacking his hand against the crafting table before managing to actually pick them up from its surface.

"Huh," a voice says, and Legundo freezes as the events of the previous day start to sink in. Ominous disembodied voice. Won't say why it's here. Lied about knowing him. Might've been watching him sleep. "I almost forgot that you wear glasses."

Legundo scrunches up his face as he puts his glasses on. “Yep. Is that a bad thing?”

“I dunno,” the voice says. “I’m just not used to you wearing glasses. Hard to picture.”

There it is again – that weird implication that the voice knows him, even though it claims to have mistaken him for someone else. It only takes a split second of consideration before Legundo decides it’s time to start digging for information. “Mmh,” he says. “I mean, I don’t know what I’d look like if I *didn’t* wear glasses.”

“Eh,” the voice says casually, *“y’know.* Piglin-y. Gas mask and/or tusks. Always squinting at people suspicio– *oh my god other you needs glasses.”*

Legundo stiffens. *“What.”*

“That’s why he’s squinting all the time!” the voice says, delighted and also seemingly completely oblivious to the mounting sense of dread Legundo’s feeling right about now. “He can’t *see!* Oh, when I get back there I’m working a miracle and that miracle is called finding out his prescription. I bet it’s the same as yours. What *is* yours, by the way? You nearsighted or farsighted? Little bit of both? Only in one eye?”

Legundo stares at the wall, fingers digging into the threadbare sheets. His heart is still pounding in his ears, and he blinks a few times before dragging his gaze out into the house.

“Other me?” Legundo repeats, maybe just *slightly* too sharply.

The voice hums, clearly taking a moment to consider this. A stair plops down at the foot of his bed, and the voice follows that movement – they’re sitting down, or at least pretending to.

For a few quiet moments Legundo becomes aware, just ever so slightly, of a building heat in the room. Not just warm, but stiflingly so – searing heat that makes it hard to breathe, like he’s surrounded on all sides by lava.

“Yep!” the voice says, chipper as ever, and the feeling vanishes. “Other you. Didja think you were the only Legundo out there, buddy? *Nah.* I’m like the *guardian angel* of Legundos.”

Legundo releases the grip he has on the blanket and swings his way out of bed. “I hate that. I actually really hate that.”

“Aww, don’t *worry* about it,” the voice coos. “That makes two of you. Seriously though, what’s your prescription, I’m gonna blow other you’s mind.”

Legundo mumbles out the script halfheartedly, mind racing as he tries to figure out what his *angle* is here – what the *voice’s* angle is, for that matter. They’re too matter-of-fact and friendly to be Decem. They’re too loose-lipped to make for a good pawn, at least not in the sense of someone being directly sent here to kill him. That’s a start, but it doesn’t make the rest of the situation any less *wrong.*

They know another version of him oh-so-casually. They’re completely invisible, potentially even intangible, but they can move things around like a regular player can. He can’t see them, he doesn’t know what they look like, but *they know another him.* And something about the phrase *guardian angel of Legundos* just feels incorrect somehow, like it’s covering up something else – it just doesn’t feel *right.*

“Ooh,” the voice says, *“classic* Legundo facial expression right there, going in for a round of overthinking someone’s motivations. Don’t worry about it, Legs! I’m just here to help.”

Legundo bites back the instinct to snap back at them with a *help who, exactly?* – just because they’re not a *direct* pawn doesn’t mean they’re not still serving some purpose counter to his own. He can’t afford to let them know that, not yet.

Instead, he shoots them as annoyed a glare as he can muster, grabs his pickaxe, and crosses the room to the solitary door, accidentally slamming it behind him in the process of stepping outside.

It’s still an entirely normal world. Legundo glares at the grass for a moment before heading down into the valley towards the lowest point. The sun hasn’t quite peeked over the mountain edges yet, but the sky is a beautiful blue, and Legundo takes several deep breaths of cold fresh air before talking.

“I know you’re following me.”

“Well, *duh,”* the voice says. “You’re basically the most interesting thing around here.”

Legundo scowls at that – if Decem has sent someone here to follow him, then they’ve chosen an *awful* stalker who’s doing what is quite possibly the world’s worst job at hiding it.

Then again, barring the Night Machine… Decem don't tend to show their hand this early. They wait until he has a foothold in the world before sending in whatever nonsense they have to throw at him – or at the very least, regardless of their exact thought process, weird stuff just *doesn't* happen this early on. Dizzy spells, flashes of speech and forgotten memories, those usually start happening around thirty days in when he's just starting to get acclimated. Weird structures, ominous obelisks, and *direct* hallmarks of their presence? If they're not there right off the bat, it takes up to *half* his time there before they start showing up. Nothing has *ever* happened on day one, before he's even had a chance to process that it's happening in the first place. It's completely unprecedented.

The voice has been helpful, sure. They haven't attacked him, they helped gather materials and find a place to settle down and build a house. They also *know another version of him,* though – and Legundo is almost *certain* that's not a lie. They've known him for one day, which can't *possibly* be long enough to pick up on something as subtle as a facial expression being a tell for a very specific line of thinking.

Whatever's going on, it's not only weird, it's a kind of weird that he *doesn't recognize,* and that's quite possibly the worst part of this entire situation so far.

Legundo's been quiet for a while now. He elects to stay quiet, hoping that if he keeps walking in silence the voice will get bored and leave him to his thoughts for a while.

Unfortunately, that plan has one critical flaw – he's forgotten that the voice *does not shut up.*

"So, other you," they say, breaking the silence with a topic Legundo isn't sure he wants to hear about but is *positive* that he won't have a say in the matter. "That's a whole entire *situation,* let me tell ya. Raised in the Nether by piglins, likes gold a *liiittle* too much, sense of quote-unquote *honor* absolutely off the charts and maybe also using the wrong sort of moral compass entirely. Doesn't like that I try and look out for him. I was thinking it had to do with that whole *honor* thing of his, but now I'm thinking maybe it's just a general Legundo thing?"

"Have you considered that it might be a you problem?" Legundo responds dryly.

"Don't see how it could be!" the voice chirps.

Legundo stops walking. “You’re a weird disembodied voice that says concerning things roughly every three sentences or so, and you *don’t* see how you might unsettle some people?”

“I,” the voice says, faltering ever-so-slightly, “well, I’m not *usually* disembodied! You probably just can’t see me ‘cause you haven’t killed the dragon yet.”

Legundo snorts. “Right. You’re a weird disembodied voice that says concerning things roughly every three sentences or so, *and* your visibility depends on the death of the dragon.” He makes sure his eye roll is exaggerated enough. “Don’t see how you could be unsettling. My mistake.”

“Hey!” The voice says. “I help out the best I can when it comes to you – apparently it’s a Legundo thing to make that job as hard as possible!”

Legundo doesn’t respond, just spins his pickaxe in his hand and starts clearing some dirt until he can find stone. He gets roughly waist-deep into the ground before the voice responds with a huff, their cheerful tone now clipped with annoyance.

“So. It’s really gonna be like this every time, huh? I try to help, and you just don’t listen. Funny, that.”

Legundo tucks a piece of cobblestone in his pocket and considers those words very carefully. *We try to help. You just don’t listen.* He’s heard that one before, and he didn’t like it any better when it was coming from the masterminds ruining his life.

“Who *are* you, anyway?” Legundo asks, keeping his tone as light and casual as it can get. Pickaxe in his hand, axe on backup – stone tools aren’t *great,* but they’ll do in a pinch. Step slowly back up onto the grass layer so they don’t have a height advantage.

“Huh,” The voice says, tone thoughtful, now standing behind him. “Was hoping you didn’t share *that* in common with him. We can just breeze past this whole paranoia thing, alright? I’m not here to hurt you. I’m an honest person, Gundo, and if I really was trying to kill you or whatever? You’d know.”

Legundo hates that they’re right. If something is in his world and it wants to harm him, it always makes that *painfully* obvious. The second something dangerous arrives, they make it very clear Legundo is public enemy number one. And he hates that the voice is right,

because he doubts the voice knows all this, or that they're thinking of the same stuff as him.

The voice giggles, this half-panicky half-amused laugh that makes the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. "I got your *back,* Legs. *Trust* me on this one."

Legundo doesn't respond. He's a little bit preoccupied with two things – trying to act like he's not thoroughly unsettled by the situation at hand, and *also* trying to mentally think of some way to get rid of a ghost that *won't* involve attracting worse attention.

"Anyway!" the voice says, tone abruptly shifting back into a perfectly cheerful register. "We should get iron, right? Classic progression and all that?"

Legundo gestures down at the stone. "Yeah, that's… yeah."

The voice hums a little two-tone of affirmation, and Legundo twitches ever so slightly before going back to mining. He can already hear the sound of a zombie or two through the stone, so he's not surprised when he mines through the ceiling of a cave.

It's easy enough to reach through the ceiling and jab at the zombies with his sword; he continues poking at them with it until they just stop moving and vanish into white smoke. Legundo glances each way down the rest of the cave before dropping down, marking the spot with a torch. It's only a two block drop from his initial entrance, but the cave sharply veers downward a few steps away. Legundo carefully approaches the edge, glancing over it and whistling in appreciation. Maybe the twist is giving him impressive views. That'd be nice.

"Yeah, uh, let's get some iron before we try to tackle that, huh?" the voice says, and Legundo watches a rock soar over the edge. It falls a good 50 blocks before hitting a ledge and then tumbling further down into a massive cavern lit by pockets of lava.

"No kidding," Legundo mumbles, and turns away from the edge. There's some iron embedded in the wall nearby, and he gets to work prying it from the stone. A full suit's probably the bare minimum, along with enough material for a pickaxe and a sword. He'll need a bucket as well, and a flint and steel for when he eventually hits the Nether. Legundo does the mental math - just over half a stack.

Shouldn't be too hard.

“You’re a real no-nonsense kinda guy,” the voice says, placing a torch up against the wall, “aren’tcha? Even the other Legundo makes jokes *sometimes.”*

Legundo shrugs and keeps mining.

“I mean,” the voice continues, “you *definitely* have the whole enigmatic wanderer type of mystique going for you. *Oooh,* what’s he gonna say next, what ominous portents is he here to warn of, or is he just gonna breeze into town like a lone samurai and then leave without a trace? Really makes you think.”

Legundo rolls his eyes. “Last I checked, I’ve said approximately zero things about anything even *approaching* an ominous portent. I think you’re getting us mixed up.”

“No I’m *nooot,”* the voice responds, briefly ducking away to light up the small bit of the cave that curves upwards before terminating in stone. “You’ve just been saying them in your head and refusing to let me in on anything, is all.”

He sucks in a breath through clenched teeth as quietly as he can muster. “And if I am?”

“I’m just sayin’. You seem like a guy who does really convoluted internal monologues. That’s all.” A torch dances in the air, as though the voice is tossing it from hand to hand idly. “Hey, want me to duck into the wall and see if there’s any exposed iron pockets nearby that we can mine into?”

“You can *do* that?” Legundo says, somewhat playing up how incredulous he sounds. It’s not actually that far-fetched – in fact, it’d explain why the voice never seems to make landing noises when dropping down places, and how they’re able to so quickly get from one place to another without making any footsteps. It’s better to sound like he hadn’t considered it, though.

“Yeah, yeah, I know, I’m awesome.” The voice snickers, and the torch dances towards the edge of the wall. “Alright, well, don’t die on me while I’m gone, mmkay?”

Legundo makes a face at that, but the voice doesn’t seem deterred; the torch in their hands phases through the wall, presumably along with the invisible presence holding it. He stares at the stone a second longer before shaking his head, twirling the pickaxe in his hand again, and getting to work mining out a small coal vein. The sound of stone

on stone echoes quietly through the cave, and if he concentrates *really* hard, he can almost hear monsters from the bottom of the cavern. Hm. He might want a diamond weapon before he goes down there, or at the very least a bow and shield.

There's a pocket of copper behind the coal, and Legundo glances once behind him before hopping into the little alcove. Might be worth building with later - never too early to start thinking of decoration.

He starts mining the edges of the vein, pocketing the ore as he does so. It's a small deposit, but anything is better than nothing. He's setting a torch against the wall when he hears soft footsteps on stone, and glances back towards the opening to the hole in the wall he's found himself in–

–and promptly snaps himself back into hiding, tucking himself into the corner as tightly as he can, heart pounding in his ears. He's not sure where a creeper came from, but when he's this underequipped – stone sword and axe, no shield – he doesn't stand a chance. He takes a deep breath, holding his sword in his hand as tightly as he can. Maybe he can block off the hole before the creeper spots him, or at least somehow shove it down into the cavern before it can explode.

Legundo inches back towards the opening, as carefully as he can. His hand has just made it around the corner when the creeper hisses, and he jerks back again instinctively – but it's not the extended noise of an impending explosion, it's a sharp and quick hiss. It makes the noise again as he stands there, and this time he recognizes that sound for sure, because that sound means it's taking damage from something. *That* means he might be able to finish it off before it can explode, as long as he moves quickly.

He takes a moment before peeking into the cave again, sword in one hand and blocks in the other. The creeper isn't looking at him – or, no, that's not quite right. It's trying to turn its head towards him, and something is stopping it. Legundo freezes mid-step as it jerks its head towards him with another hiss, and then there's a leafy *crunch* sound as its neck snaps, head wrenched backwards entirely too far by some unseen force.

It falls to the floor with a strangled sound, and twitches once, twice, before vanishing into smoke. A soft laugh echoes off the walls of the cave, quiet and deliberate, utterly unreadable. If Legundo hadn't been frozen in place before, that sound on its *own* would've done the trick.

“C’mon, Legs. I *just* told you not to die on me.” The voice kicks the pile of gunpowder, scattering it uselessly across the floor. “Found a few iron pockets close by.”

Legundo stays right where he is, staring into the dark, looking for something he can’t see.

The voice clicks their tongue and sighs. “Still not picturing me tall enough, buddy. Oh – if you’re worried, you should know I have a stone axe. I’ll toss it over to you if you’re *real* paranoid, but you don’t need me to do that, *right?”*

It takes a bit of effort to force himself to move, but Legundo shakes his head no, swapping out his sword for his pickaxe again, staring at the floor of the cave.

“Iron?” he says. It’s a pathetic attempt to move on from what just happened, from the weight that still hangs in the cave. The voice doesn’t seem interested in mocking his attempt at changing the subject, though – it just hums that two-tone note again and takes out a torch, starting to toss it back and forth once more. It’s almost as bad a try at moving on from the situation as his own attempt was, but at least that makes them somewhat even.

“Should be back in the direction you were mining, actually!” the voice says, cheerful as anything, and Legundo suppresses a shudder. “Already lit up for you and everything, so hopefully *that* won’t happen again! I’m gonna check in the other direction, maybe also look around for wherever the heck that creeper came from, get some iron for myself if we’ve got time.”

“Right,” Legundo says, still trying to catch his breath surreptitiously. “Thanks.”

“Happy to help, Legs,” the voice responds distantly. “Oh – *here’s* your problem. I didn’t think there was a way into this part of the cave from over here! Welp. Fixed now!”

“Thanks,” Legundo faintly repeats, and turns on his heel to start breaking through the wall. It’s a good few blocks before he makes his way into the next cave over, but sure enough, there’s a good vein of iron waiting for him.

Legundo starts mining, tries his best to stop thinking about what’s just happened, and prepares himself for a long day spent underground.

Chapter End Notes

Solar's note: i told our beta that the creeper scene is the first instance of "this fic is marked M just in case" and they very confidently responded "fair! i do think 13 year olds do worse in fortnite tho" which has got to be one of the sentences of all time forever.

also, we forgot to say this last time, but be gay do minecraft leave kudos if you enjoyed and a comment if you want to yell! i eat comments for power. they fuel me.

--

Fluffy's note: do you fly a white or black sail as you arrive to Athens?

Chapter 4: 003

Chapter Summary

The third law of motion: for every action, there is a counteraction – a push in the other direction.

Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Light stalking-adjacent implications.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Legundo manages to grab his glasses in one go this time, shoving them on his face and blinking at the daylight streaming in through the windows. Actual windows. Not fence posts.

Not to mention the fact that his house seems to have gained an extended floorplan and basement while he's been asleep.

"Goooood *morning!"* the voice says, bright and cheerful, and Legundo is pretty sure they're crouching on the foot of his bed. "Yep, still not used to the glasses."

"You don't make a very good sleep paralysis demon if I can't see you," he shoots back, swinging his feet off the side of the bed and stretching.

The voice snickers. "Aw, *buddy*. You don't need more night terrors

than you're already clearly having."

Right. Of *course* the disembodied and lightly murderous voice would be watching him sleep with enough attentiveness to tell that he has frequent nightmares. Just his luck. "Why are you like this?"

"Great question! Long story that isn't for strangers I've known for a little over two days. I'm surprised you're asking me this early on! Normally it takes *longer* for people to do that. We must really be speedrunning the whole friendship thing, huh?"

Legundo grimaces at the word *friendship,* and apparently his expression is enough to send the voice into hysteric giggles as he gets out of bed. He checks around the house – the entire floorplan has been altered, apparently. More rooms, wider footprint, a little more detailing, still only one floor tall. The glass panes reflect the light into his eyes a little too painfully, and Legundo hums thoughtfully before turning back to the voice.

"You a builder?"

"I'm really more of a redstoner," the voice says, "but I dabble. Appreciate the uh, compliment, though."

Legundo squints at them, hand hovering over his axe – he hasn't known them very long, but he's starting to learn some of the voice's tells. Their voice is pitched ever so slightly higher, like they're amused over *something* and Legundo just happens to be missing the joke.

"It's a good build, for what's around," he eventually says.

The voice hums. "Those night terrors must be *real* bad, seeing as you were able to sleep through all the, uh, building."

Legundo drops his hand and settles on reaching for an apple he's had tucked away in his inventory. "Long story that isn't for strangers I've known for a little over two days," he parrots, and crunches into the skin.

Another giggle from the voice. "Fair enough! So, Legs, buddy, what's on the agenda today?"

He finishes his bite of apple and clears his throat. "Exploring. I'm wondering what's on the other side of the mountain, maybe I'll see if I can find a village and get those early trades. I'm taking the bed with me, and –"

"– and I'm gonna follow you, so you don't really need to explain all this," the voice says.

Legundo rolls his eyes. "Do you seriously not have anything better to do? I can't imagine you spend literally *all* your time following the other version of me around."

"Hm," the voice says. "Well, no, I don't, but he's not *squishy*. You almost *died* yesterday, remember? You get full iron, maybe get an enchant or two, *then* we'll talk."

"I *have* full iron," Legundo grumbles, pretending not to notice the reference to yesterday's nightmare fuel. "I just haven't made it yet."

"Why? Whatcha waitin' on?"

"I was tired last night," Legundo mutters, checking the furnaces and pulling out the smelted iron. "I was caving all day and I had a near death experience. Things like that tend to make you tired."

"I'll let it slide for now," the voice says as Legundo starts crafting up his iron. "But really? You couldn't have waited like, the extra ten minutes before going to bed?"

Legundo holds up his finger, the other hand meticulously placing the iron into the correct slots on the table. "Rule number one of hardcore worlds, weird voice. You don't let night happen, not unless you're prepared. An extra ten minutes can mean a lot."

The furnaces light up again, and Legundo frowns before leaning over to check on them – there's gold nuggets sitting in the little alcove, slowly softening their way into bars. He leans back over to the crafting table, but lets the question hang in the air.

"Ten minutes means a lot," the voice says, "And an extra gapple or two *also* means a lot. Guardian angel, remember?"

"Overprotective monster under my bed," Legundo counters, and buckles the chestplate over his torso before pulling on his helmet. He leans against the table as he straps on his greaves next, stretching his legs to make sure he has enough range of movement.

The voice waits until he's done before pulling the gold out, scattering it on the crafting table along with an apple. "Monster? *C'mon,* Gundo, you can come up with better insults than that."

“I could,” he says, watching them craft a handful of golden apples. “If I was trying to insult you in the first place.”

“Aw,” the voice says, tossing him an apple, “was that supposed to be a *compliment?”*

“Nope.” Legundo nearly bites into the golden apple before remembering it is not, in fact, the apple he’s actually been eating. “Just a statement of fact.”

“Maybe it’s a Legundo thing, just being mean to me *specifically,”* the voice drawls. “Would certainly explain a *lot* of things.”

Legundo shrugs. “Again. Mysterious disembodied voice. People can lie.”

The voice groans, and there’s a dull *thunk* like they’ve hit their head against the wall. “Yes, Legs, I get it, you’re paranoid and don’t trust me, I only want the best for you, our interests clash because you keep thinking I’m gonna stab you in the back. I’ve heard it all, so if we could just speed the trust part up a *little* bit faster, that’d *really* make the rest of this easier.”

Legundo reaches over to grab the next golden apple they’ve made, tucking it into his inventory. “I’m headed out. I’m sure you have better things to do than follow me.”

“You *know* I don’t.”

Legundo is already out the door, starting the hike around the edge of the valley, rather than dipping downwards and having to climb all the way back up. He’s curious about what’s on the other side of the mountain, of course, but he’s not *quite* curious enough to risk powdered snow.

The door opens and closes behind him, and Legundo pretends not to notice it, instead choosing to take a few moments to breathe in, breathe out, plan the route he’s taking, and set out. The voice *had* said there was a ravine somewhere in the side of the mountain, so finding that would probably be a good way of finding the customary mineshaft if nothing else.

“So!” the voice says, not even ten seconds into Legundo pretending they’re not there. “Nice weather, great day, we’re off on an adventure, you never did tell me what the deal is with hardcore worlds being, and I quote, *the only thing you can do.* You’re a little twitchy for a

thrillseeker, so I'm guessing it's not just daredevil-type antics, like, the risk makes you feel *alive* or whatever, *so* – what gives?"

"Next question," Legundo says, pulling himself up a ledge. The voice starts sputtering out protests, and Legundo is pretty sure they've just phased through the ground to get closer to him.

"And here we see another *classic* Legundo tactic," they huff, keeping a steady pace next to him. "Deflection! Not quite as skilled at it as you are at *denial,* but it's still in your toolkit for a good reason. Hey, are you gonna answer all my questions with 'next question?'"

Legundo raises a brow at that, but he doesn't stop walking. "No."

"Oh, *very* funny. Hey, mind telling me more about your night terrors?"

"Next question."

"I'm dying of laughter, Legs," they say, voice dripping with sarcasm. "Clearly you are both a comedy master *and* a hardcore expert. Say, do you do hardcore worlds by *choice* or – ?"

"Next question."

The voice giggles, and Legundo catches a spinning axe out of the corner of his eye before the item in their hands is quickly swapped out for a torch, then a spare gold ingot. "Aw, did I hit a *nerve* there, Legundo?" They're closer to him all of a sudden, nearly at his side – they've closed that distance *fast,* and done it silently to boot. "Something you *don't want me to know?"*

Their voice has dropped almost an entire octave. It's not only unreadable again, but a *different* kind of unreadable – this soft, almost saccharine tone, calm and assured. It's not a *fully* new register, but the fact that he recognizes it's the same tone as yesterday's *incident* doesn't feel reassuring.

"Oh," the voice says, still low and sing-song, "oh, I did, *didn't* I. Here I am, trying to keep you alive, and here *you* are, keeping secrets from me. That's what's going on, *isn't* it?"

Legundo tenses up, swapping his axe into his mainhand as fast as he possibly can. He holds it just beneath the head of the weapon, splinters digging their way into his skin.

"I said *next question."* The voice just laughs softly in response, and his

grip on the axe tightens. “I don’t know what you want from me, man – I don’t even know your *name,* so I really don’t want to answer these questions.”

“Interesting how that works!” The voice pops up, now on the other side of him. They hum idly as he spins around to confront where they’re coming from. “‘Cause, see, you *do* know some stuff about me. C’mon, Legundo, let’s *review,* maybe it’ll make me feel less like a *threat.”*

Legundo shakes his head. “I’m going exploring. By myself.”

The voice sighs heavily, and Legundo clenches his jaw as their axe becomes briefly visible again – it’s replaced by a golden apple the next split second, but that’s not nearly enough to make him relax even a *little* bit. “Review, pop quiz, *whatever* we want to call this. *C’mon* Legs, you’re good at thinking under pressure. Exhibit A, I’m not usually a disembodied voice. Told ya that day one, huh? Exhibit B, you gotta kill the dragon to see me. Make your own connections there. Exhibit C, now this is a *fun* one! Ask me why it’s fun, Legs.”

Legundo grits his teeth. “No.”

“I’m so *very* glad you *asked,* Legundo!” The voice drops that octave again, and Legundo flinches as they laugh, a sound that’s starting to border on the edge of unhinged. “Exhibit C, Legs? *I know you, and I know how you work.* So stop being so *difficult* about all those answers – you’re gonna end up giving them to me *somehow,* might as well make it easier on *both* of us.”

The thing that kills him, really, is how *happy* the voice sounds while saying all of this. Through the *entire* threat (because that’s what this is, a thinly veiled threat), they’ve sounded like they’re smiling, cheerful despite the slowly welling panic in Legundo’s chest – or, worse, if they really know him as well as they claim, *because* of it.

“So,” the voice says. “Let’s try this *again,* Legundo. *What are you hiding from me?”*

He stands there, now holding the axe in *both* hands, feeling his arms twitch ever so slightly from raw adrenaline, and absolutely does not consider his next move more than this:

They’re on the edge of a ledge. The fall damage isn’t enough to kill, but it’s enough to be *very* inconvenient to get back up from, and there’s also an easier drop the other way that will put some distance if he can just jump the gap from here to the nearest treetop.

Legundo puts away the axe. The voice, who sounds *exactly* like they're up in his face, laughs smugly, and in the middle of that laugh he brings up his hands again and shoves them backwards as hard as he can, then turns and *books it* in the other direction as fast as he *possibly* can. Doesn't stop to look back behind him (not like there's anything to see), doesn't stop to apologize or to make sure they didn't die or even to check and see if they *did,* no, he just *runs.*

He takes some fall damage making it to the tree, but turns the stumble into part of his sprint, kicking up leaves as he drops from the trees and down to the ground – he'd rather not stay a visible target, even if dropping down takes him on a slightly shorter path. The low hanging branches whip across his face as he shoulders through them, and Legundo is pretty sure at least one of them hits hard enough to draw blood, but *he doesn't stop.*

He just runs.

And runs.

And runs.

Until the panic recedes ever-so-slightly, enough for him to have a rational thought surface from the flood of terror, and he launches himself into a river, pushing off the sand at the bottom to make it to the other side. He clambers out of the river, ignoring the dirt sticking to his skin. Wipes off his glasses with the inside of his sleeve and finally, despite his pounding heart, looks behind him.

Of course there's nothing there – wouldn't be even if he *had* been followed – but Legundo still feels the paranoia slowly die down as there *continues* to be nothing there. No sounds. No movements. No soft, horrible laughter.

The adrenaline fades, leaving him heaving for breath as quietly as he can manage, winded and generally overexerted but, crucially, *alone* in this feeling. It still feels like he's being watched, sure, but it's that vague general prickling sort of paranoia, not that *feeling* he's started to get around the voice.

He hasn't been followed. (Or, if he has, they're keeping their distance and keeping their mouth shut, which is good enough for him.)

Legundo lets out a heavy sigh of his own and keeps heading in the same direction he's pointed himself, this time at a *much* more reasonable pace. He's looking for a village, he's looking for any other

points of interest, and, *ideally,* he's looking for an excuse to stay away from home base for at least a couple nights so that the voice will stop watching him sleep.

The mountain is still visible behind him, and Legundo makes note of the direction. It's an easy enough landmark to find again, if he gets lost. Outside of the mountain and the valley, however, he's going to need to take a better look at the scenery to more generally orient himself.

It's a simple enough forest – he's been through enough of these worlds that he's expecting something new, but no, it's… just trees. He laughs to himself a little (what kind of person is surprised to find trees in a forest?) before continuing his scan as he moves forward. Nothing crazy pops out at him. No superpowered mobs, or rainbow bees, or even a new plant. There's a bit of weird terrain generation, with a cave coming to the surface and a ring of stone surrounding the entrance, but it's nothing truly unusual.

Legundo sets down a torch and continues on.

At some point, the forest blends out into a plains, which lasts for a good 50 blocks or so before turning into a spruce forest. Legundo grabs a couple of the saplings and some wood, and then stops as he realizes something. He'd been suspicious of this when he'd first landed in this world, but it's only really starting to hit him now.

What, exactly, *is* the twist?

Day one could've absolutely just been an adjustment period, so he was willing to shrug it off as a sort of wind-up. Day two, ditto, though he'd have expected at least some sort of hint at *something.* But now? Now, – he glances up at the sky – a little over halfway through day three? There should've been some sort of *tell* by now. Even if it's a case where the *actual* twist isn't coming until later, he should have enough information to piece together what's going on here.

Should is the key word there, of course, because he *doesn't.* He knows the world generation doesn't seem to be modded in any way, and he hasn't seen any new blocks or items or mobs, *and* there haven't been any weird structures (or, thankfully, monoliths) either. It's just him, in a seemingly completely ordinary world, and also an invisible voice with completely inscrutable motives.

As weird as that is, though, it just seems too *obvious* to be the twist. And Legundo knows he's retreading his thoughts, but he's entirely

sure the voice isn't Decem. Maybe an agent of an agent, a spy of a spy, someone who knows of him through word of mouth, but what would even be the point of the voice being the twist? If someone was here, invisible, it would make much more sense to not tip their hand and reveal themselves. Paranoia, as effective as it is, can only go so far in actually *killing* Legundo.

A fox squeaks off to the side, startling him out of his thoughts. He glances over to see beady eyes staring at him from the brush, bright orange fur stark against the faded greens of the taiga.

"Hi," he says. "Sorry, no food."

The fox squeaks again, leaping out of the bush and trotting across his path, vanishing back into the closely packed trees. Legundo idly thinks about following it – but really, there's no point in doing so without any way of taming it, and he's not really even sure if he *wants* to have pets in this world.

He brushes under a layer of pine needles, and finds himself face to face with a cobblestone wall. He blinks at it, taps at it with his hand just to make sure it's real, and peeks around the edge of the house. Villages usually mean noise, and the forest is quiet save for him.

The second side of the house is practically shattered. Jagged rocks lay in scattered piles, shards of glass catching the sunlight as Legundo quietly moves around the outside of the wall, hopping up onto the foundation of the long-ruined house. Dust kicks up around his feet, and Legundo pulls up the neck of his shirt to avoid breathing it in, heart sinking as he does so.

Now that he knows what he's looking at, it doesn't take long for him to pick out the strained, rattling groan of a zombie villager on the other side of the wall. Lucky for him, they seem to have gotten trapped in a cobweb – he peeks around the corner to check and, sure enough, they've fallen into a hole in the floor and are stuck there. Unfortunately for him, though, seeing them is enough to confirm this is absolutely just a ghost town. No friendly faces in sight, just more hostile mobs.

He tries to cheer himself up – maybe he'll be able to get into the Nether pretty soon, and then he'll have the golden apples *and* weakness potions to bring this place back up and running – but it doesn't really do much. There's only so much comfort he can take in thinking that hey, if he *remembers* then he *might* be able to fix this in

the *future* – the problem is that, for now, he's still completely alone.

Well, alone except for a spooky voice that somehow *isn't* the twist. That, all told, is objectively worse than just being alone.

He checks the other houses out – one has an intact chest with a couple pieces of stale bread in it, but it's better than nothing. Another house has a blast furnace inside, so he grabs that as well, making sure to check each corner before he lets himself be distracted.

Luckily for him, it seems like the ground around here must've been particularly unstable. Almost every zombie villager he's found has been stuck in a hole, looking up at him with lifeless eyes and reaching with rotten hands, sunken exactly far enough into the ground to be unable to reach him. Legundo spots exactly one zombie that *isn't* trapped right as he's leaving the village, and only because it leaves a broken–down house and promptly catches on fire, staring straight at him as it fades into ash and smoke.

Legundo tries not to take it as an omen.

Sadly, given where the sun is in the sky, the village is probably going to be his only interesting find for the day; he looks around for a good spot to sit and eventually settles down off to the side of a decently sized lake. He stares into it, wondering if it's worth it to get his feet wet in order to try and catch a few fish, and then remembers that he *does* have food already. It's a bit late to call it *lunch* at this point, and stale bread and apples isn't much of a dinner, but it'll do for the time being.

With his momentary rest, though, his thoughts start wandering back to the voice again. He runs through each and every word of their threat, scanning for double meaning or possible hints. Random words are scribbled in the mud to the side of him - *disembodied, dragon, knows me, hiding.* There's something here that means something, he's sure of it, but he's not sure exactly *what* it is or *how* to figure it out. If anything, it seems like the only way to get answers is to talk to the voice, and that happens to be the one thing Legundo would *really* like to avoid doing.

He's stuck between two unknowns. On the one hand, he could operate like he usually does now that he's ditched the voice – try and do his normal setup, get potions to restore the villagers, get an elytra, maybe build a nice house – although that's taking a *big* risk with what little the voice has said about themself. Considering they're already able to

affect the world as-is, he's honestly a little worried that killing the dragon might somehow cause them to turn into some kind of turbocharged superthreat.

On the *other* hand, there's no proof the voice isn't *already* a turbocharged superthreat. Not when they've told him almost nothing useful – they've made threats, they've said that they know another version of him, they *claim* they want to help him, and they've been vaguely friendly when they're not being menacing. That's about it – no name, no clear modus operandi, nothing of the sort that would provide any real information about who they are or what they actually want from him.

He's not stupid enough to think they *don't* want something. If there's one thing he's learned, it's that *everyone* has ulterior motives – even if their real goal is something completely altruistic, there's *always* more than one reason why people are doing something.

So, sure. Maybe the voice actually meant it when they said they wanted to help out and that they only wanted the best for him. Maybe, just *maybe,* they might've even been *partially* telling the truth. That doesn't change the fact that they're doing it for reasons Legundo isn't aware of, though – and unknown motivations are dangerous ones.

Legundo buries his head in his hands and sighs. He's never a fan of the early days, where he's fearing for his life. He'd much prefer to get into the world, have a good base, a solid plan, and a story to tell; all things to work towards and keep him grounded. That's looking more and more out of sight, with the threat of a hidden twist still looming. Faking it is one of his greatest skills, though, and Legundo sighs heavily before dropping his hands, pulling the bed out of his inventory, and placing it down on the ground. An extra hour or two of rest before he sleeps won't kill him, even though he *feels* like it will. He lays over the top of the covers, tucks his glasses into his shirt pocket, and closes his eyes, listening to the gentle swaying of the trees until he drifts off into sleep.

Chapter End Notes

> Solar's note: hi everyone. this morning the dog ate my cranberry orange muffin DIRECTLY off the table while i wasn't looking and i am so very deeply distraught about this. also fluffy is visiting so that's cool but HE ATE MY MUFFIN. THE DOG ATE MY MUFFIN. WRAPPER AND ALL.

please leave comments in this trying time, for i fear i shan't recover from this grievous betrayal. i am a broken, muffinless man.

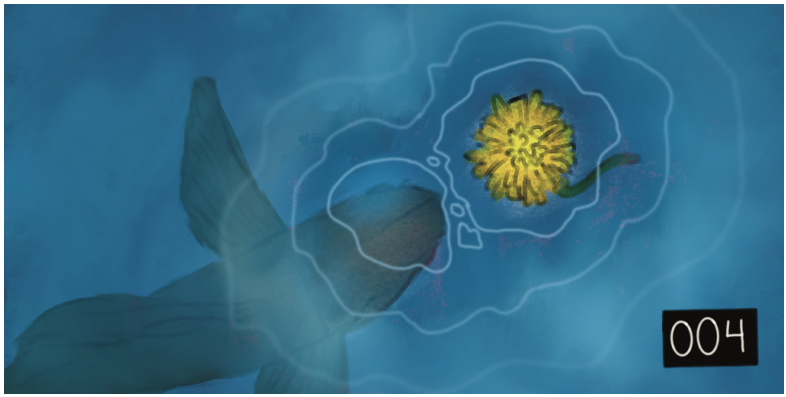
--

Fluffy's note: im still in shock about the muffin tbh, no ominous portents here

Chapter 5: 004

Chapter Summary

Information is withheld and threats are levied to little effect.



Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Brief but intentional triggering of someone's paranoia.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There's someone watching him. Legundo knows that the second he wakes up, even while still half-asleep. He keeps his breathing steady and doesn't open his eyes, just pretends to shift around, pulling his blanket further up before looking out under his lashes. There's no one there, of course, but that lack of presence narrows down the possibilities significantly.

The only question is how long Legundo can wait before they say something. He waits there, trying not to move too little or too much, listening intently – for rustling noises, quiet breathing that isn't his own, anything that would give the voice away.

"So," the voice says, softly – not exactly ominously, just relatively quiet – "are we gonna just keep pretending I'm not here, then?"

…Welp. So much for that. Legundo is still considering what exactly he wants to say when the voice speaks again.

“That’s fine,” they say, still quiet and subdued. “If that’s what it takes to get you to not run off and into danger. We’ll just keep doing that, then, ‘cause I’m great at pretending I don’t exist. Out of sight, out of mind.”

Legundo digs his teeth into his lip before he can fire back with some kind of snappy response like he *really* wants to, and instead very carefully deliberates whether or not he *actually* wants to open his mouth. He decides to sit up first, nice and slow. Slide his way out of the bed, slide his shoes on, and tuck the blanket in before putting the bed back into his inventory.

The voice hasn’t said anything else. Legundo gets the sense they’re waiting for him.

“Where are you right now?” he asks. He purposely doesn’t scan the clearing, instead simply staring at the lake next to him. The wind ripples the surface of the water, and it’s a good few seconds before the voice says anything.

“Behind you, about twenty paces.”

Legundo resists the urge to snap his head around, instead shuffling his feet until he’s facing the right direction. He counts out the paces in his head, staring at the ground, and then looks up at where he thinks the voice is.

“There?”

The voice snorts in a “it was funny but I’m still mad” kind of way, and a torch starts spinning in the air, right where Legundo is staring. “Well, now you’re thinking I’m way taller. Appreciate it, but no.”

Legundo carefully bites the inside of his cheek, tasting his next words before he dares to say them. “You’re angry.”

“Oh, yeah,” the voice says. “I’m furious, Legs.”

Legundo closes his eyes, and *very distinctly* does *not* reach for a weapon, instead pulling his glasses out of his pocket and sliding them on. “You can’t be mad at me for that. You – you purposefully try to scare me, and then you get mad when I run.”

“I mean, I *can* be mad at you, but I *think* I’m starting to understand.” The torch keeps spinning, flames flickering. “You’re a lot more paranoid than the other Legundo. A lot. Like, *a lot* a lot. Legs, if it was

a paranoia contest, you would win by a landslide, and then you would be suspicious about winning because you would think the whole thing was a trap. Hm. Why *is* that?"

"The other me probably isn't in a hardcore world," Legundo says. "I'd imagine that has something to do with it." It's not *actually* an answer, not in the slightest, but it's enough information that it's really not something the voice can complain about.

They *tsk* slightly. "I mean, *ch'yeah,* but also, I'm not stupid. I'm tryin' to be polite about this, Legs, 'cause I've got a bruise on my back telling me you don't like being pushed directly, but I *gotta* know what's going on at *some* point."

"You'll know when it's relevant," Legundo says, setting down a crafting table. He's picked up enough string fighting his way through cobwebs in that abandoned village, and since there's not any other major goal to work towards right now, fishing seems good enough as anything.

"I don't wanna know when it's *relevant,"* the voice says. "I want to know *before* it's relevant, so I can be *ready* for it." The torch spins around one more time, pauses, almost frozen in midair, and then begins to spin in the opposite direction.

Legundo forces himself to look at the fishing rod he's making, spinning the string around the stick until he's sure it won't come loose. Stale bread doesn't make *great* bait, but it's more appealing than anything else he's got, so he threads it through the hook before tossing the lure into the water. He doesn't say anything, but the voice keeps humming, inching ever so slightly closer.

"Day one," they say, and Legundo flinches when he realizes they're directly next to him. "Why do I have to look out for obsidian towers, Legs? Why haven't I seen that yet?"

Legundo watches a shadow cross underwater – a fish ignoring the lure. "We haven't been here long enough."

The voice snorts, and a rock skips across the water, sending ripples across the top. "You think whoever's stalking you cares about that?"

Legundo opens his mouth to answer back, and then snaps his mouth closed, hard enough his teeth audibly clack against each other. "...Sorry?"

There's a heavy sigh. "Legs, *buddy*. I'm not *stupid.* The paranoia, the fact that you hate me and you're easily unsettled, the whole 'hardcore worlds are the only thing I can do' bit – it's not exactly a stretch to say you're being hunted by something. Or someone. Someones. Somethings. Whatever."

Legundo rubs the bridge of his nose. Just his luck – he's done his best to give the voice as little information as possible, and here they are picking up on things they have no right to know about anyway. "Fine. No, it's not that they care. I just haven't been here long enough for them to lock on and *start* doing things."

The voice leans forward, closer in towards Legundo. "Sooo, this mysterious *them,* they just… know where you are all the time?"

"I don't know," Legundo says, reeling in the line as it snags on something. This *is* the truth – he's got no idea how closely Decem can track him, or even if that's the right *term* for what they're doing. "Feels like it sometimes, but maybe they only have a general idea and are just very good at guessing. Unfortunately for me."

A descending whistle from the voice. "Yeesh. Sounds *rough.* You got any idea when they're gonna start acting up?"

"Nope," Legundo says, tossing aside the tripwire hook he's fished up. This one's a lie, of course. He *does* have a general idea, assuming this follows the rules of a regular world – he just doesn't much like the idea of the disembodied voice with vibes that range from weird to straight-up rancid getting to know the finer details of his own personal torment.

"No idea? None?" The voice turns cheerful again, back to its usual volume once more. "Gee, Legs, that's characteristically unhelpful of you."

Legundo tenses his grip on the fishing rod, staring out into the water. "Why do you care, anyway? Like, yeah, you're looking out for me or whatever you said, but –"

"Last time I'll say it," the voice says. "Legundo, I am here to *help."*

"Are you?" Legundo says without thinking, and instantly bites his tongue. Stupid, stupid, *stupid* question to ask. The voice doesn't seem to take immediate offense, though, or at least not enough to kill him on the spot. It takes him a second to realize the soft noise they're making is muffled laughter.

“You are just –” The voice lets out a puff of air, and Legundo can almost imagine their hands thrown up in mock defeat. “You are something *else,* Legs. We are *really* gonna have to work on that paranoia.”

“You haven’t given me a single reason to trust you,” Legundo responds, feeling a little bit braver given that the voice hasn’t *once* gotten outright violent towards him, even with what he’s just said. “Seriously – a weird, mysterious disembodied voice that claims to know another me. I’m not crazy for not trusting you, I’m being *practical.* Give me one thing about you – something that doesn’t relate to *me* – and maybe, *maybe,* I’ll start to trust you.”

The voice hums their two-tone note, and Legundo watches as a dandelion gets plucked out from the ground and tossed out into the air, gracefully landing down on the surface of the lake. “It’s a two-way street, Legundo. Give me something about you that I don’t have to sleuth out.”

Legundo grits his teeth, stares at the water and the slowly drifting flower. There’s a tug on the fishing rod, but he doesn’t pay any mind to it, instead biting out his response with as much venom as he can manage.

“You want to help? You aren’t acting like you have my best interests at heart.”

The voice laughs. It’s not a nice sound – it rests right in the uncanny valley between a snicker and a giggle, equal parts bitter and smug. *“Ehe.* Remember what I told you a couple days ago, Legundo? I’m an honest person, I *really* am, and if I was here to hurt you, well…”

Legundo freezes in place. It’s not exactly an ideal response, but it’s a completely instinctive one – because there’s a *hand* on his shoulder. He can’t see it, even if he was able to turn his head, but he *knows* it’s there – he can feel the weight of it, pressing down just hard enough to make it difficult to change his position, fingers curled ever so slightly around his shoulder and loosely settled there.

The voice leans over him, grip shifting ever-so-slightly without giving him a chance to move, and when they speak again – in that horrible low, soft tone – it’s *right* alongside him, almost directly next to his ear. *“…you’d know.”*

Legundo doesn’t dare move. Might be holding his breath, actually, as if that’ll save him from something that’s already well within range to

stab him or do something else similarly awful. He just sits there, silent, staring out at the water, at the flower drifting further and further offshore, not showing any sign of sinking –

– A shadow, probably a fish mistaking it for a bug, snaps down next to the dandelion, pulling it underwater. Legundo shudders, unable to stop himself from doing so before the voice notices.

They laugh, already back to that cheerful tone once again, and lift their hand – they clap him on the shoulder once, and then the weight vanishes and their next words are from what is *blessedly* a reasonable distance away. "O *kay!* Good talk, Legs!"

Legundo releases the breath that was starting to hurt his lungs, shakily setting the rod down on the grass and burying his face in his hands. At this point, he doesn't care what the voice sees – they have proven, time and time again, that they know things about him, and he's had a *lot* of panic responses over the last four days. It's not exactly a secret at this point, and Legundo sits there on the lake side, taking deep breaths until he feels like maybe his heart won't jump out from his chest.

"You're not working for *anyone* ?" he says, muffled into his palms.

The voice clicks their tongue. "Nope! I'm just here to watch over you."

The really awful part is, Legundo's pretty sure that's the truth by now – there is no twist. Not relating to the voice, at any rate. There's just someone else in the world with him now, and that might genuinely be worse than *anything* else he's experienced so far.

It's a balancing act now. The voice still can't be trusted with information about Decem, considering the most charitable way Legundo can think to describe them is *unstable,* but Decem can't know about *them,* because they're a rogue agent around a group that *really* likes their well-laid plans.

Legundo drags his hands down his face, almost pulling off his glasses. "I – okay. Okay. Yeah. Fine. Yeah. Can I have *two* minutes of alone time before we start heading home. Just – let me have some alone travel time, like yesterday?"

"I mean, you weren't exactly alone yesterday *either,"* the voice says, and *tsks* when Legundo goes back to hiding his face in his hands. "Hey! You want me to be honest, you gotta accept that I'm not gonna let you out of my sight!"

“I am going to have a heart attack,” Legundo says directly into his hands. “My hardcore streak is going to get broken because you can’t stop being creepy.”

“That’s *real* sweet, buddy. I’ll just wait over here while you collect yourself. Pretend I’m not here.”

“Mm,” Legundo responds unhappily, and closes his eyes to do exactly that. He’s half expecting the voice to try and do something else spooky, but the more *rational* half of him points out that, according to the way the voice has acted so far, they’re not going to do that unless he provokes them again.

One minute goes by. Two minutes. *Three* minutes. The voice stays silent – he can still tell that they’re there, because he still feels like he’s being watched, but they haven’t actually *said* anything or otherwise made any noises. It seems like he’s actually in the clear for the time being, as far as the voice being ominous goes.

“Okay,” Legundo finally says, picking his fishing rod up from off the ground and standing up. “Let’s go back home.”

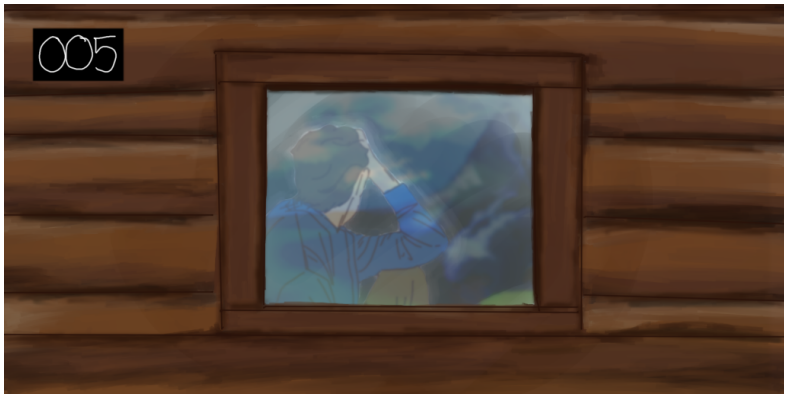
Chapter End Notes

> Solar's note: fluffy visited this past week! i am so sad to see them gone that i nearly forgot to upload. frickin' oops. this upload is a little rushed, sorry about that!
>
> also, i go back to school in two days, so there's a pretty good chance uploads *might* drop to biweekly -- hopefully we'll be able to get more backlog to avoid that happening, but being a full-time student really does keep you busy as all hell.
>
> anyway LOOK AT FLUFFY'S CHAPTER ART IS THAT NOT GORGEOUS AS ALL HELL. i am so very seriously considering making it my laptop background you guys.

Chapter 6: 005

Chapter Summary

Idle chatter to deter the devil's business.



Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Brief and tongue-in-cheek discussion of sapient spiders.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Something's clattering outside the house.

Legundo stares at the wall. The thin covers haven't been doing much to keep him warm, and the fact that he can't quite pin when he woke up isn't exactly *helping* with the goosebumps on the back of his neck either.

It feels off in a way he can't quite put his finger on, until he shifts to stare up at the ceiling instead and realizes there's been no morning greeting from the voice. The feeling of eyes on him is entirely absent, and that gives him more pause than anything else.

More clattering, this time from the other side of the house. Legundo lifts his head up to try and peek out the window, but nothing comes into view.

He doesn't… Legundo can fully admit to himself he is entirely too

cautious sometimes, but this feels like a well justified situation to be cautious in. The voice is gone and something is moving around outside the house. Going back to bed is no longer a possibility, and–

Something smashes into the side of the house with a barely muted thud and rattle, and Legundo sits upright, reaching for the sword leaning against the bedside table.

His fingers brush the handle, and there's a soft shuffle outside before there's a flicker of movement by the window. Legundo's gaze has turned slightly away from it – by the time he looks back, the mob has already moved past the glass. He's pretty sure it's a skeleton. Nothing else quite looks like bone, unless now is when the twist starts coming into the world.

Although, come to think of it – it's not like the mobs here are mindless killing machines. The creeper on day two had known to track him. It wouldn't be unexpected for the skeleton to be able to see him through the windows. Not quite enough to be the full twist, but…

Another bang against the wall. Legundo flinches. At this point, it seems like the mobs are just straight-up trying to tear down his house. This'd be expected behavior from zombies, but the bone-clacking noise of the skeleton is a little less expected. Still, skeletons can't break doors down, so for the time being it's safe enough to sit tight. He hopes. He grabs onto the sword anyway.

The slamming noise does in fact come from the door this time, accompanied by a bony *crunch* that implies this particular skeleton is determined enough to get to him that it'll break its bones against the door in order to get it open. To the skeleton's credit, the door *does* swing open. To the skeleton's *discredit,* it then immediately vanishes in a puff of smoke, dropping a couple arrows as it does so.

Legundo stares at the arrows as an invisible foot kicks them aside.

"Oh," the voice says, with what sounds like a faint smile in their voice. "You're awake."

Legundo briefly considers his options here. He decides on a safe one.

"Course I am," he says, and swings his feet out of bed. "You're making enough noise to wake people up two worlds over." (Okay. Maybe it wasn't a *super* safe option.)

The voice snickers, and Legundo can feel the bed slightly shift as they

presumably perch on the foot of it. “Yeah, well. Combat doesn’t tend to be quiet, Legs. Maybe stop sleeping in so much if you don’t wanna be woken up, yeah?”

Legundo quickly stands up and moves around, grabbing a piece of chicken and heading to the window. “They would’ve just burned.”

“And that creeper would’ve just killed you,” the voice says sweetly, still on the bed. “Don’t complain about the person protecting you, Gundo, buddy.”

Legundo tilts his head to the side, glancing at where he’s left his sword by the table. He’s not considering grabbing it, and he thinks the voice can tell that – they leave them to sit in silence until he can get a grip on his thoughts.

“Person?”

“…Legs,” the voice says, pained. “I’m pretty human shaped. It’s not like there’s a giant spider monster following your every move.”

Legundo shrugs and sits, pointedly turning his head to look out the window. “I bet the giant spider monster would let me sleep in.”

“I bet the giant spider monster would eat your face,” the voice counters. “In fact, I bet it would eat your face and commit psychological warfare about eating your face. That sounds like exactly the sort of thing that a giant spider monster would do.”

“I’d ask who hurt you,” Legundo responds, “but it seems pretty clear that the answer is *the giant spider monster.”*

“I’ve never actually met any giant spider monsters,” the voice laughs, and the bed squeaks as they shift around. “But from what I’ve heard they do evil stuff like that. My friends had an encounter with one.”

Legundo is tempted to snark at them, *You have friends?,* but decides against it, choosing to instead enjoy his breakfast. With nothing to retort off of, the voice goes quiet as well, leaving Legundo to simply stare out the window and at the mountain.

It’s a pretty mountain. He could totally do some fun cabin-style architecture there. The powdered snow hidden up there might be an issue, but once he gets a platform and a staircase settled, it shouldn’t be that hard.

The early sun reflects off the snow, and Legundo idly watches as something up on the mountain shifts, the snow falling a bit further down the hill.

“What’cha thinkin’ about?” the voice says from directly over his shoulder, and Legundo resists the urge to jump out of his seat. Apparently whatever brief quiet mood the voice had settled into is gone again.

“Wondering where I’m going to build a proper base,” he says. “Mountain’s nice. Easily defensible, and it looks good too.”

“M-hm,” the voice says. “I dunno, man, I smell sculk under that thing. Which is cool if you’re going for that sort of vibe, but you’re also kiiinda squishy right now, so, like, you *sure?”*

Legundo grimaces. “You can *smell* sculk?”

The voice clicks their tongue. “Oh, yeah. Best sculk sniffer out there, no doubt about it. Never been wrong about where a patch is. Large enough that you might get a decently sized ancient city under there too. I think.”

“I mean, the base would be on the surface,” Legundo says, squinting at the mountain. “It’d be great if that ravine you mentioned leads down into an ancient city, though. Would make navigating between it and home base really easy with an elytra if I could just glide back and forth. Did sculk stuff recently, otherwise I’d maybe even turn a bit of it into a secondary base.”

“I repeat; you are kinda squishy right now,” the voice says, more amused than judgemental. “Though – elytra? It’s only day five, Legs, *surely* you’re not gonna go fight the ender dragon like this?”

Legundo shrugs. “I’ve done it with less.” He looks over at the chest where his iron armor is sitting (on top of a chest by the door) and makes a mental note to find a village soon – unenchanted iron wears out *fast.*

“I mean, if you’re *sure,”* the voice says. “I’m definitely not gonna say *no* – y’know, the whole *physical body dependent on the death of the dragon* thing? I just wanna make *sure* you know what you’re doing.”

“It’s something to do,” he responds. “Gets boring if I don’t set any goals besides just surviving.”

“And also because elytras are good for making quick escapes?” The voice has moved to his other side and seems to be sitting down next to him, if the relative height of their voice is anything to go by.

Legundo idly picks at a loose splinter on the windowsill and tries not to overthink that comment. “Yeah. Sure. That too.”

“Had a feeling.” The voice sighs. “Hey, speaking of which, do your local and/or non-local stalkers start acting up before or after the dragon gets killed?”

Something about this line of questioning makes Legundo uneasy, especially after the whole “giant spider monster” bit. He elects to ignore it for the time being – answering this question isn’t exactly going to give the voice any useful information they could leverage somehow, and he’s *mostly* sure the spider thing was a joke. “Either,” he says. "Doesn't summon them, doesn't ward them off. They show up when they show up."

“And that’s around… *when,* exactly?”

That question is a little trickier to answer – Legundo hadn’t wanted to give them the answer earlier, and now he’s unsure of how to answer. Legundo ends up just… shrugging at the voice, for lack of anything else to do. “When it’s least convenient for me.”

It’s kind of a non-answer, and – judging by the soft *hmph* sound the voice makes – they both know it. “You ever gonna give me *any* helpful info, Legs?”

“Eh,” Legundo says. “It’s more fun to make you work for it.”

There’s a dull thud against the window, like the voice has kicked up their feet onto the glass. Legundo looks for scuff marks, finds none, and looks back towards the mountain with thinned lips when the voice doesn’t respond. Waiting for Legundo.

And damn that paranoia, because there’s no good reason *not* to tell the voice why he never stays in a world for long. They’re going to figure it out soon enough, and it might even be helpful to explain to them that if they’re helping him, they’re going to be in danger too. Turn that potential danger against an enemy that would likely either attempt to recruit or more likely obliterate the voice completely. He should probably warn the voice of that.

But something in his throat won’t let the words pass his lips, and

Legundo opens and closes his mouth several times before finding a different question.

“So. Other Legundo. He’s uh. Piglin-y?”

The voice clicks their tongue. “Something like that. His folks are piglins.”

“Mhm,” Legundo presses his tongue against the back of his teeth. “So… he’s grown up there. He has a life there. You two have a world you live in with your friends, and he’s been there all along. Nothing to chase him off.”

“Yeah? I mean, from what he’s told me,” the voice says, and drifts off. Legundo can hear them take a small breath, and then there’s another thud against the wood of the floor as they swing their feet back down. He can guess they’ve twisted to look at him.

Legundo plucks the splinter piece from the window and flicks it to the ground. Waits for them to ask the question, because that’s easier than answering.

“I’m an idiot,” the voice says, inflection flat. “Oh, that’s so… that’s so *obvious.* You don’t get to stay once they show up. Huh! Alright then, *alright* then. *That’s* good to know.”

“It’s usually a few months,” Legundo says. “Though I have a good streak. Never died, it’s always been them chasing me out of the world.”

The voice laughs at that, leaning away from Legundo. Again, their inflection is flat, but it doesn’t seem to be directed at him, so Legundo will assume he’s done his job well of starting to sway them against Decem if they come calling.

He goes back to looking out the window, where the morning sun is just starting to crest over the valley’s hills and leak into the house. Legundo hums in thought, checking the axe in his inventory. If he spends all of today gathering wood (and maybe a little bit of stone), he can start a proper base tomorrow by getting that platform up on the mountain – and once he has a home base in the works, he can go looking for a proper village. Have somewhere to stash the loot from it and to possibly also stash the villagers themselves in.

It’s a good plan. Legundo stretches out and moves to stand. He hitches the axe on his belt, tops off his food, grabs his sword, and puts on his

armor before heading out the door. He doesn’t say a word to the voice, even though he can feel them watching him.

After all, they’re just going to follow him anyway.

Chapter End Notes

> Solar's note: i miss deceit, you guys. i need the giant spider monster to commit more psychological warfare. anyway, comments are appreciated as always!

Chapter 7: 008

Chapter Summary

In disquiet, rejection. In denial, hypertension.

Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Offscreen violence towards an Enderman; sounds are briefly described. Light stalking-adjacent implications.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If the voice is so insistent about waking him up early, Legundo muses, he's going to start throwing a bigger fuss about it.

It's still mostly dark out - the early hours of dawn, where the sun's rays lighten the sky but do not color it yet. The blanket is still threadbare and thin, but there is now a second layer of sheets, and a second pillow. Legundo stares at the darkened ceiling and wonders if he should grab his sword this time – it's still resting within arm's reach, although he's finally upgraded it to iron at this point. His fingers twitch as he considers grabbing the hilt and standing up, but he forces them to pull away the edge of the blankets instead and sits up. He's slept in his armor, and he's feeling the soreness that comes with it. Legundo tilts his head one way and then the other, stretching out his neck, and then stares out through his window.

The first sound that had woken him wasn't very loud, but – even in his

sleep, Legundo has a survivor's instinctive reaction to the sounds of creepers, and there's at least two outside his house. Weird, though – creepers don't burn in the sunlight, last he checked.

He listens as a creeper takes damage again, then hears the telltale sound of crunching leaves he remembers all too well from his second day. He swings his legs out of bed, iron armor clinking gently against itself as he meanders towards the glass, glancing from side to side to see if he can find the second creeper.

The darkness is quiet and still. He can't even see a pile of gunpowder or a weapon, although… come to think of it, he's not actually sure if the voice is fighting these mobs with a weapon at all. Either way, there's nothing to see, and Legundo has half a mind to turn back to head back to bed.

A hand smacks against the glass. Dark, long fingers, grossly articulated as they lightly scrape against the window, clawtips leaving tiny gouges in the panes. Legundo moves before he can think about what he's doing – he jumps back, snapping his head up, knowing *exactly* what he's going to end up locking eyes with.

The enderman stares at him. Its eyes seem to reach down into his soul, freezing him in place as that gruesome hand scrapes against the glass again, and Legundo can hear the hint of whispers trying to enter the back of his mind. He shudders as the enderman opens its mouth to scream at him, instinctively closing his own eyes and turning his head to avoid looking at it. It's not a tactic that works on endermen normally, but then again, endermen don't normally aggro through glass panes either. All Legundo can do is hope he hasn't doomed himself by looking away. Hopefully, the enderman loses interest and just walks away.

He repeats it like a prayer. *Just walk away. Just walk away.*

The enderman hisses and screams again, nails screeching against the glass, and Legundo feels himself tense up even further as there's an ugly *thud* against the window. Like the enderman is trying to break in, or like –

Legundo takes a sharp breath as the enderman screams again. He can tell the difference now, panic working overtime in his head to inform him of the scene he can't see. That's a scream of pain, and he's almost able to count down to the exact second it thuds against the wall again, probably *not* of its own volition.

There's an extended hiss, and Legundo holds his breath as the glass makes a sound he can only half identify as – a hairline fracture, he thinks might be the term? Or a spiderweb crack? It's a break in the glass, one that doesn't involve it actually shattering but will severely weaken the pane's overall integrity. The enderman gurgles, and there's one more small *thunk* before it gives a raspy scream, the sound quickly fading into nothing.

Silence.

Blank, heavy silence. Legundo stays exactly where he is, eyes closed, fists clenched.

It takes a moment, maybe while they go to kill the other creeper, but eventually, slowly, the door to the house opens. Legundo refuses to look at them, refuses to open his closed eyes, refuses to unclench his fists even as he can feel his fingernails digging into his palms.

The voice hums. There's the sound of the door shutting, the simple lock latching into place.

"Legundo?" The voice says, each syllable clipped with exhaustion.

Legundo stands almost perfectly still. He's not sure why he's not answering. (Which is him lying to himself of course, because he's *terrified.)*

The voice waits a moment, and then sighs. Legundo can hear their soft footsteps against the wooden floor, and a gentle *tink* as they place something down on the table before wandering over to him, idly circling around where he stands still.

"Sleepwalking," the voice says, forcing a laugh. "Of course. C'mon, Legs. Back to bed, buddy." He can't tell if they're offering him an out or if they're trying to convince *themself* that he didn't see them. It doesn't really matter.

He can feel a disturbance in the air near him. Like the voice is considering whether or not to reach out and put a hand on his back to steady him, arm half outstretched but not quite there.

Legundo can easily solve that decision for them. He staggers, his first few steps unsteady, and then regains his footing as he heads back to bed. He's drawn a map of where everything is, according to memory, just so he doesn't need to open his eyes and ruin the voice's excuse. He feels almost light-headed as he tries to concentrate on using his

hands to feel out where he needs to go without making it too obvious that's what he's doing. Bump slightly on the doorframe – step towards the bed – pull the covers back – avoid hitting the sword still leaning against the side of the bedframe – keep his eyes firmly closed as he lays on his back, as his hands pull up the blankets and then fold over his chest.

(Like a body in a casket. Maybe he should break the illusion to ask the voice to bring him a bushel of cornflowers, just so they can have a proper funeral.)

The voice lets go of a breath Legundo hasn't realized they were holding, shaky and unsteady. He hears a few footsteps scrape against the floor before the sound of their becomes more like a quiet breeze, almost entirely silent except for the soft sounds of objects being moved around the house. Legundo idly wonders how that works. Are they mostly intangible, except where they're in contact with the world? They make a lot of sound for a voice without a body, and Legundo had been able to shove them – had been able to feel their hand reaching out towards him.

It makes the most sense. He'll operate by that theory for a while, unless proven otherwise. Legundo takes a deep breath in and lets it out, simulating being asleep still. His eyes are still shut, and with nothing to occupy his hands, he can feel himself drifting off to sleep again. His head feels heavy, and his hands drop from his chest to his side as he falls back into the phantom feeling of nightmares.

It seems like only a second later he's jolting awake, panic hitting every nerve he has, the phantom nightmare pressing against his shoulders, on the inside of his chest, choking him to the point where he drops his head on the bed, forcing himself to take one deep breath. Forcing himself to slow down, one breath at a time, even as he swears he can feel every detail of the world around him pressing in and suffocating him –

No. Breathing. He's breathing. The armor he's wearing is a comforting weight, and his forehead is pressed against his thin sheets, his fingers making claws where they're digging into the wool mattress.

When Legundo can focus on the world again, outside of the rush of blood in his ears, he is very quietly aware of a change in pressure on the bed. Right next to him, hand carefully hovering over his back once more.

Neither of them say anything. Neither do anything to acknowledge the other.

Legundo balls the sheets up in his clenched fists, and forces himself to exhale. The taste of bile is strong on the back of his tongue, and he doesn't particularly feel like throwing up first thing in the morning.

The hand over his back drifts away, and Legundo exhales again, forcing the panic out of his body with every breath.

Their voice is quiet and soft. Even before he processes what the voice is saying, something about that tone grates against Legundo's fraying nerves.

"Those night terrors aren't just normal bad, are they?"

Legundo throws the sheets away. They tangle on his legs as he rips himself out of bed, and he kicks them to the side. His heartbeat is erratic as he stumbles towards the food chest, grabbing the first thing he sees and making his way outside, leaving the door swinging behind him.

The crisp air is a relief the second it hits his lungs, a desperately needed reminder of his change in location, and Legundo makes his way a good distance from the house before his legs decide to give out under him. He pretends he does it on purpose, and forces himself to keep breathing – deep and steady breaths as he sits down, checks what he's grabbed without really seeing it, and then begins to tear his steak breakfast into shreds with his teeth as methodically as he can possibly muster.

Slowly, the world starts to come back into focus around him. Legundo forces himself to keep still, finishing his breakfast before he allows himself to move and freak himself out further.

The mountain is covered in snow. There's a stone and spruce platform sticking out of the side of it now, the side facing the peak of the mountain already supporting a snowdrift. The walls are partially built, logs and planks reaching upwards like a wooden ribcage, and Legundo forces another breath as he watches the hint of rain and snowfall drift around the mountain. Maybe it'll head his way. He's not usually a fan of precipitation, but the change would be nice.

He chews slowly on his last bit of steak, and wipes his fingers on the grass. There's a soft breeze carrying the clouds, and he watches the wind ripples through the valley below him, grass swaying in

hypnotizing patterns. He digs his fingers into the grass under him and then curls them further into the dirt, rooting himself in place as his mind finally clears the rest of the panic and his heartbeat returns to normal.

He tilts his head to look up at the rapidly greying sky, tasting the rain that is absolutely making its way towards him – towards *them.* It's not the only shift in the air, though.

Legundo tilts his head towards the nearest disturbance before speaking.

"I'm fine."

"You *sure* about that?" The voice says. Their words are stained with doubt to an absolutely *irritating* extent; Legundo briefly curls his lip in annoyance before masking that expression as quickly as he can. "Cause that kinda looked like a *nasty* panic attack, Legs."

"Fine in the sense of I'm fine *now,"* Legundo says, feeling dirt work its way under his nails. "Thanks for checking in. I'm going to go work on the base."

The voice splutters as Legundo moves to stand. He pauses his movement as the voice keeps sputtering, half-formed syllable fragments of confusion he doesn't pay attention to as he carefully focuses on where that hand is, where it's staying over his shoulder. He drops his new iron axe from his inventory to his offhand, waits for a single beat, and in one swift motion grabs it by the edge of the blade and swings the handle up into the voice's hand.

They stop talking very quickly.

The iron axe hovers in the air for a moment. It drops by a fraction, and then another, and Legundo tilts his head again and forces an entirely fake smile at the voice.

"I said I'm fine," he says, keeping his tone to be even and steady. "But if you want, you can come help me build the base. Or gather materials before that rain gets bad."

The axe vanishes much more abruptly than Legundo's used to seeing items vanish when the voice is putting things away. He waits, listening around him for the disturbance that would give them away, that quiet sound of footsteps he's learned to predict.

There aren't any. There is just the quiet sound of the wind in the grass, and Legundo's heartbeat in his own ears. He's done the math here wrong – pushed in a place where he wasn't supposed to, broke an unspoken rule, and he switches from *waiting* to *anticipating,* carefully angling himself to be ready to defend if (when) something comes swinging at him.

There's an easy laugh behind him. Casual and calm, but like with most gentle things, it still feels like nails on a chalkboard to Legundo.

"New rules," the voice muses. *"Okay.* I can work with this. You know what you're doing, *I* know what you're doing. Alright."

Legundo tenses and twists towards them. "What?"

"I'm thinking out loud, buddy," the voice says. "Cause if I keep thinking to myself I think you're gonna have another panic attack, and I'd *really* love to avoid that if possible. New rules! New rules. There's new rules."

Legundo isn't quite sure if he should drop his defensive posture. He settles for making a face in the voice's general direction, waiting for a further explanation.

The voice laughs at him. It almost feels patronizing. "Rule numero uno, no touchy the Legundo! Well, I can't *promise* you anything, but hey, I'll do my best, y'know? I can at least *try."*

Legundo forces his face back into neutrality. The voice hums their two tone note. And then does it again, now to the far left of him.

"You're *veeery* good at this, Legs," the voice mutters. "I think I can read you, and then you just go and surprise me again. I would call it annoying if it didn't just make me more *curious."*

Well, if *that* isn't just about the worst sentence in the world, Legundo isn't quite sure what is. He doesn't react to it – doesn't let himself move until he's sure he has control over his face and limbs and words. He only speaks again when he's absolutely sure of his ability to keep an even tone.

"Why are you the way you are?"

"I can't believe you're not even the first Legundo to ask me that question." The voice sighs, the vague sound of someone who's a little self-aware that the noise is going to sound pointed even when it's not

intended to be. “Man, maybe it *is* a me problem.”

Legundo raises an eyebrow. “You’re just *now* realizing this?”

The voice makes a quiet *mm* noise, but doesn’t respond. If it wasn’t for the uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach and the fact that he’s heard no movement, Legundo would assume the voice had left the area entirely. And on the one hand, fair, that was a *little* bit mean – but on the other hand, he’s pretty sure that being rude to a weird semi-intangible voice that keeps trying to poke him is *completely* justifiable.

Still. Legundo clears his throat. “Anyway, I’m gonna continue on the base. Work to be done and all. Are you gonna help or go get materials?”

“Materials,” the voice mutters flatly. “Just don’t die while I’m not watching.”

“Well, if you’re gonna keep cursing me like that,” Legundo says, “I’d appreciate if a few stacks of spruce and a few stacks of cobblestone were delivered to my corpse, please.”

He gets a sigh for his troubles, and the axe reappears much further away than he'd expected the voice to be standing. It spins in place, once, twice, and the voice clicks their tongue before responding.

“Yeah, I can manage that. See you in a bit, Gundo.”

“Bye,” Legundo says, and it echoes flat, no one available to respond.

For all that he’s wanted to be left alone, Legundo can’t help but feel like he’s done something wrong.

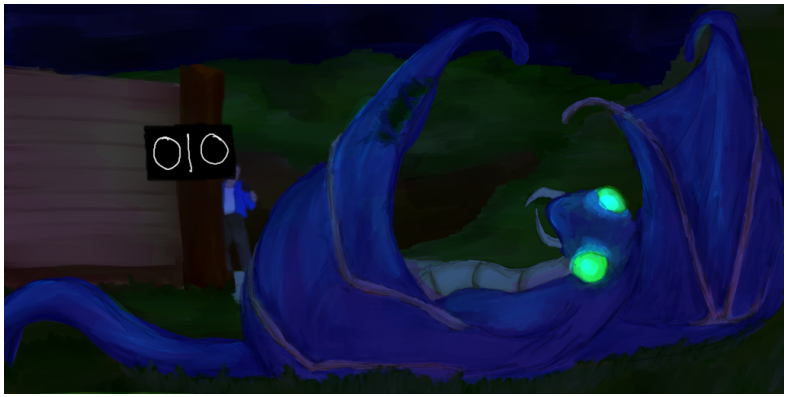
Chapter End Notes

> Solar's note: early upload today so people have plenty of time to read this and then go watch Legundo in Block Wars at 2pm EST. good luck! let's go 2 for 2 on reverse sweeps!
>
> edit: they didn't win but they still ruled. legundo S tier on comms forever

Chapter 8: 010

Chapter Summary

The turn against...



Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Partially described severe violence towards a nonhuman creature.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The lodge is coming along semi-decently.

The walls are still mostly unfinished, but Legundo's okay with that. Enough snow had already piled onto the floor that the roof had been a necessity, but even with the sky blocked off the cold wind still whistles between the columns of wood, biting at Legundo's exposed skin.

He tucks the dirt scaffolding back into his inventory and studies the slope of the roof. It's a little too late to make any adjustments, but he still carefully eyes each tile until he's sure there's nothing out of place.

The last two days have been quiet. Legundo has dedicated most of that quiet time to building, only coming down for refills on food and to sleep. The voice has occasionally stopped by, but all they've done is give cursory greetings, deliver materials, and then vanish again. It hasn't exactly been the alone time Legundo is used to, but it hasn't

exactly been social either, leaving him in a strange place between wanting to talk and wanting to proceed as normal.

Legundo hasn't really talked to anyone in a while. It feels weird to go back to that default.

The roof is perfect, because of course it is, and Legundo rubs his hands together to get the blood flowing before he starts down the shoddy path back to the starter base. He can work again on it soon – right now he just needs a break from the cold.

Hopefully, there will be a voice waiting down at the house that he can talk to. Even more hopefully, he might be able to apologize. Lay down some ground rules, soften the blow of the two-day old insult, and get past the whole thing so Legundo can get this stupid pit of *guilt* out of his stomach, and *move on* with the world. (And yes, maybe he should be apologizing for reasons that *don't* primarily involve absolving him of feeling bad, but it's better than nothing, right?)

The walk down from the mountain and around the valley doesn't take more than ten minutes. Legundo spends most of it mumbling to himself, half formed apologies fumbling around each other until he thinks he has a solid enough start. He can figure out the rest once he hears a response from the voice.

I think I hurt your feelings. I'm sorry. Can we start over?

Simple enough. Maybe effective enough too. Legundo still doesn't trust the voice, but if he's going to be living with them for the next hundred days, they need a redo of how they've started, or something drastic needs to change. And since they both seem like *experts* at pretending nothing is wrong, it's probably going to end up being the first option.

Legundo steps onto the newly laid gravel path out in front of the starter base and beelines for the door. He's so focused on his goal – on hoping the voice is there so that he can get this over with – that he misses the white shards sticking out of the ground until he's already tripped over them. He nearly ends up crashing face-first into the small rocks, and is only just barely able to catch himself in time. Still falls over, but his extended hands take the fall instead of his entire body.

He hisses in pain. Rebalances himself on his knees and looks at his stinging palms. Minimal blood, so that's good, but *damn,* it still hurts. Falling on gravel is *not* a pleasant experience, even when it's a somewhat familiar one.

His eyes flick to what he'd tripped over – weird thin white stakes sticking straight up? It takes him a second to realize what he's looking at, and actually *realizing* is enough to dull the pain from his palms with what Legundo can only call an extremely sharp sense of unease.

Bones. Fractured and splintered, not like they'd drop from a skeleton naturally – these have been snapped in two or broken into pieces, their sharp edges shoved into the ground, some even look like they've been *gnawed at* by something.

Legundo feels his stomach turn as he looks over at the rest of the gravel path to see more white fragments and stakes scattered around the area. They're on the grass, too – in a general area around the house. He's pretty sure he sees a couple vertebrae lying an uncomfortable distance away from each other.

Okay. You know what? Maybe he's *not* going to apologize to the voice. They need to have a talk, sure, he doubts he can get out of that, but it's going to have to be more of a "stop being a creepy murderhobo or I'm going to start swinging" talk at this rate – because, well, *yikes.*

Legundo kicks aside a patch of gravel and sweeps what shards he can into the hole, staring down at the flint-and-bone mixture as he covers it back up. Maybe the isolation *had* been good, actually – instead of unmanageable panic, all he feels is a deep gut sense of unease. Something is *wrong* with the voice, and he's going to have to deal with it, and it probably won't go very well. Legundo opens the door to the starter house as cautiously as he can, fully expecting some kind of horrorshow.

There is none. The house looks exactly the same as usual. The cracked window has even been replaced.

Legundo isn't expecting much, but he still calls out "Hello?" into the seemingly empty foyer and waits a few seconds, fully expecting to be proven horribly wrong once again.

Nothing. The silence remains unbroken with the sole exception of his footsteps on the ground – Legundo lets out a long, heavy sigh and goes to put the leftovers of his building materials in the chests. Not much has changed there, either; there's maybe a little bit of reorganization, a few more resources than he remembers having, but that's to be expected. He makes a pointed decision to *not* investigate them more closely. If something's in there that's going to creep him out, he'd rather not see it yet.

Without reorganizing the storage, though, he doesn't really have a lot else to do. He could go back to building or go mining, but he'd kind of like to step back from the constant grind for at least a day. That said, he *also* doesn't want to leave the area – he needs to catch the voice when they come back, after all. That means that looking for a proper village is a no-go. As for other manual labor… just thinking about it is making him tired. He always forgets how exhausting working on something nonstop can get until it's two days in and even something like fishing or harvesting crops sounds like far too much effort.

Legundo settles for falling dramatically onto his bed and sighing again.

He's not going to let himself use this time to overthink things; that's probably the worst possible use of his free time. However, slowly and carefully putting pieces together in a calm and logical way – that might be doable, and it might be helpful. After all, it's *probably* a good idea to have all the facts lined up in his head before he confronts the voice on being the creepiest thing he's encountered (despite the fact that he is being stalked by interdimensional gods who want him dead).

So. Point one. He doesn't know why they're here and, taking them at face value, the voice doesn't know why they're here either. They woke up here, right next to Legundo at spawn, and for some reason, they're taking that as a sign that they have to *protect* Legundo.

Then there's point two. They know another version of Legundo. *Guardian Angel of Legundos* might not be a lie to the voice *specifically,* but – well, based on everything else they've said, Legundo doubts his alternate reality counterpart is *any* happier than he is about the weird little voice that follows him around. The idea of having another him out there, one who is getting to enjoy a life not on the run… it's both comforting and lonely. Maybe a little scary, but not enough to bother him in the grand scheme of things.

Back on topic; point three. Legundo taps his fingers against the edge of his glasses, careful to only touch the frame and not smudge the glass. Point three. The voice, despite knowing him, despite "protecting" him, does not want to identify themself.

And, honestly, that might be the biggest problem Legundo has with all of this. It's one of those issues that makes everything else surrounding it *so much worse.* There's very little good reason the voice would have to keep their identity from him, other than… "being up to something"

is a bit paranoid, but he can't figure out how else to make it sound. Something's just *off* about that refusal to identify themself. He knows that the voice isn't working for Decem, but it's not like Legundo knows people or groups that would know of him in the first place. It's not like Legundo would *know* the voice, so there's no reason to keep the anonymity.

On a surface level read, Legundo doesn't like it. On thinking harder about it? Legundo *really* doesn't like it.

He taps the edges of his glasses, staring at the ceiling. He needs to get up and move before he starts spiraling. Some kind of activity that won't keep him in one place, but won't be too much work. Something like placing torches around the base. That's not intensive at all.

And, critically, it keeps him close.

The day passes in a sluggish haze. Legundo places torches until dusk falls, and then keeps placing them until he runs out entirely, fingers aching with splinters and charcoal. He dips his hands in a water bucket inside the house, sweeping around the small space with a grimace.

The voice still isn't back. Legundo idly wonders if they've died, and then immediately brushes that thought off. They're an intangible, invisible person who can snap creeper necks before they explode. It's very unlikely anything in the world can actually catch them off guard long enough – or potentially even see them in the first place – to be able to kill them.

Still, though. Legundo's skin crawls as he imagines tripping over an invisible body without even realizing it.

Night has fallen in the valley. Legundo flicks the remaining water droplets off his fingers onto the windows as he glances outside. The sky is dark, but the surrounding area blazes like a tiny star. He'll probably need to install banner curtains later, just to be able to sleep properly, but for now he can simply take pride in a job well done. He waits at the window until he can see the edge of the moon coming over the hills, and hums to himself. At this point, Legundo doubts the voice will be coming back for the night, but he'll stay up for a bit in case they're running late.

He clambers into the bed, leaving his sword by the bedside table as per usual. His hand hovers at the side of his glasses for a few moments before he decides to leave them on – if he really does start falling

asleep he can just knock them off, and he doesn't want to have a fight with the voice without being able to see properly. Legundo's well aware his shoes are the more pressing issue here, seeing as they're covered in dirt; he absently knocks them against the foot of the bed before leaning back on top of the covers (it's not like anyone else is going to sleep in this bed anyway.) He has a perfect view of the door from here. Admittedly, that doesn't do much if the voice can walk through walls, but it at least makes him feel a *little* bit better.

Legundo reckons he can wait up about an hour before he needs to sleep. An hour won't give that many mobs a chance to spawn. He stares very firmly at the door, fingers resting on the hilt of his sword, and starts counting the seconds.

This turns out to be a mistake an unknown amount of time later; he's woken up by a headache pulsing at the back of his head, with no idea how long he'd drifted off for.

Legundo blinks several times in quick succession, trying to get his bearings – he's still sitting up, but his hand has fallen off the side of the bed. His glasses are askew, with one side pressing into his skin. His mouth feels dry and tacky. Legundo makes a face at that, and kicks his feet out of the bed, stumbling a few times as he stands and all the blood rushes to his head.

There's no one watching him. Legundo is sure of that. But there's a *presence* around the house, of that much Legundo's also sure – there's *definitely* something outside.

He rushes to the window and then instantly scrambles away again, backpedaling as a phantom careens sideways into the glass.

It screams at him, little wing claws scratching against the planks as it tries to get traction, and Legundo watches in horror as something yanks on its bony tail, pulling it out and away from the house, swinging it into the sky like a dysfunctional boomerang. It, or something else, makes a weird noise at the same time – but it's muffled through the glass and drowned out by the screeching creature, so he can't exactly tell what it is.

Legundo stares at the identified flying menace from through the glass, briefly thrown for a complete loop. After all, he's pretty sure he just woke up from a nap. He's also pretty sure he's been sleeping more or less each and every night, because that's what he always does at the beginning of any given world.

Which, of course, his sluggish brain quickly catches onto, means there's someone else outside who hasn't slept.

His hand closes around the sword next to him completely reflexively, shoes squeaking against the wooden floorboards as he scrambles through the house with zero regard for quiet, throwing the door open and almost getting a faceful of phantom.

There's a second one – it must've been clinging to the side of the house, ready to drop directly down onto the nearest source of food. Legundo wordlessly shouts at it, digging his fingers into the rotten membrane and thrusting his sword upwards. It screeches at him and digs its claws into his arm before gliding back to the house and latching onto the wooden frame again. (There's also another noise from somewhere nearby, but it's once again drowned out by the sound of the screaming creature trying to bite his face off.)

Legundo swings the sword in his hand, changing the grip and taking a slash through the air at the vermin. It turns to smoke the second his blade connects, and he uses the momentum of his sword passing through nothing to turn quickly, spinning in the gravel and holding his sword out towards the nearest threat.

Which, as it turns out, is the first phantom, returned from the sky to careen straight towards him. Its wings spread out, ready to wrap around Legundo and cling to him. He grips his sword and prepares for the hit, watching it drop out of the sky with terrifying speed.

The phantom screeches, and Legundo takes a swing. It ducks the taste of iron, and Legundo fully prepares for the following pain of the attack.

It doesn't come. The phantom swoops under his sword and shoots away, keeping its wings tucked to nosedive straight down into the valley at full speed, almost like it's being chased away by a cat. Legundo pivots awkwardly as he tries to lunge after it and deliver a killing blow, but instead it just vanishes into the night. He stands there with his sword poised at nothing for a few more seconds before dropping his stance, blinking in confusion.

Mobs don't run away from players. That's not a *thing* mobs do. And Legundo doubts his little pointy iron stick is enough to scare off even a quarter of a phantom, so he's left rather confused on what *would* be enough.

His sword makes an uncomfortable grinding sound as it drops against

the gravel. Legundo grimaces at the sound – that's going to leave scratches at best, dents at worst. He lifts it again, sheathing it by his side, and stops to reorient himself.

The steadiness doesn't last for long. Another phantom screeches, and then there's a yell over on the other side of the house – he can't tell what the voice is saying, but it's definitely *them.* The shout doesn't seem to be pained at all, more… angry, maybe? Legundo has a good enough idea of what he'll see. Or rather, what he won't see.

He twists the sword in his hand and comes around the side of the house in a fighting stance, ready to fend off the final phantom at any moment. The torchlight glimmers off the blade, shining like a beacon as he rounds the corner.

The third phantom is already a little battered; there's tiny chunks of flesh missing around its body, and one of its mandibles is snapped. It makes a distorted hissing sound and tries to lunge towards him, wings flapping uselessly. Legundo flinches instinctively before his brain catches up with the situation and he realizes – it's stuck in place. There's something holding its tail keeping it from flying off toward him. He blinks into the darkness expecting to see something, but there's nothing to see.

Legundo takes a tiny step forward, and the phantom tries to make another move toward him. It screeches, but the noise is drowned out by something else – a low growling sound that raises in volume enough to stop Legundo from hearing his heartbeat in his ears. He steps back as the phantom makes another distressed noise and the voice hisses something he can't quite make out. It tries to pull away from Legundo and up into the sky, but can't wriggle out from where it's stuck; there's another low growl, louder this time.

The voice's volume still isn't anywhere above their normal speaking tone, but their words cut through the air with raw, bleeding anger.

"Look at me."

Legundo freezes in place. So does the third phantom, and then it's yanked back by an invisible force with a snarl.

"Look at me!" the voice yells, dragging the creature backwards through the air. *"LOOK–"* they slam the mob into the ground hard enough that there's a snapping sound, and Legundo winces sympathetically.

"–AT–" Another crunching noise, this time louder. The phantom wriggles on the ground, pinned by an invisible foot, screeching as one of its wings bends backwards up from the ground at an entirely unnatural angle.

"–ME." A sickening *crunch* sound accompanied by a sound like fabric being ripped apart. Legundo looks away too late, catches a glimpse of the wing separating from the mob's body entirely, and feels his stomach turn.

Another snapping, fabric-shredding sound as Legundo keeps his eyes averted. He doesn't want to know what it corresponds to. He knows exactly what it is, but if he just *doesn't think* about the crunching and screeching noises, then maybe he'll be able to keep his dinner down.

The phantom lets out a deathrattle. The voice sighs hoarsely and goes quiet, long enough that Legundo *knows* he's been spotted.

"Hi, Legs," the voice says in a sort of low, rough tone – not an intentional one, more like they've hurt their throat screaming and have to speak quietly to make up for it. "You weren't supposed to *see* that, so, uh, just… just pretend you *didn't,* mmkay?"

Chapter End Notes

Solar's note: hey, y'all, we're gonna be dropping to every-other-week updates for this fic. i'd say "sorry to do this to you on a cliffhanger" but i'm evil now.

the AO3 Author Level Life Shattering Event TM is upon me! and in this case it's... actually a good thing? last semester i basically tore my hair out over this one art history paper, nine full pages double-spaced, the whole whammy. i may be older than most freshmen, but i am still a freshman. it was a *lot.* apparently the paper came out really good, though!

how good? uh, so, we're gonna drop to biweekly updates because i need extra time to prepare and revise the paper *to present it at an undergraduate symposium.*

*i am **still** a freshman.*

anyway, enjoy the update! now might be a pretty cool time to go back through the archives in order to pick up on some stuff!
--
Fluffy's note:
And with the last few seconds of that blissful clock; Cinderella chose to walk.
To not return to rags in a carriage of gold;
She would face her death like the heroes of old.
Midnight struck twelve, and Cinderella remained herself
For it was not a pair of shoes that led her to be bold.

Chapter 9: 011

Chapter Summary

…and the turn back.

Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

No warnings apply.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Legundo stiffens up, hand tightening around the hilt of his sword, instinctively reaching to bring up a shield that isn't there. He carefully studies the air in front of him, looking for anything – a distortion in the air, a displacement in the grass, something to give away where the voice could be. He doesn't raise his sword, not yet, but he does drag his eyes upwards, settling on a point about two blocks from the ground.

The original idea had been to apologize to the voice and try to ease out an alliance. The secondary plan had been to confront the voice on pushing into his space and being a generally unpleasant person to be around. Neither of those ideas feel very safe now. Legundo is vaguely aware there's probably *some* kind of correct answer here, but he doesn't think he's going to land on it. He's just going to have to settle on trying to hit whatever answer will end with the *least* amount of injury on both their parts.

“See what?” Legundo says, forcing the words out with only a tinge of sarcasm. *Sure. Let’s pretend.* Something to ease the tension, to move them forward. “I just thought I heard some phantoms.”

The voice scoffs. They haven’t moved from where they’re standing, not even in that creepy silent way. “Yeah, well. No phantoms to see here, Legs.”

Legundo presses his tongue against the roof of his mouth, biting back his instinct to respond with something sarcastic. Right now, he needs to play it carefully. Change the topic, move the situation towards something familiar. What’s familiar right now? Something that makes up the bulk of their normal conversations?

…Questions. Questions are good. Half their conversations are just questions. All Legundo needs is a question that *isn’t* related to the bits of phantom membrane still strewn across the ground. He fidgets with his sword, tilts his head to the side, tries to pass off his nervous energy as simple curiosity. He can’t afford to panic here. He needs a good question.

“I need something to call you.”

Okay. That’s not exactly a question. Judging by the tired laugh from the voice, though, it’s at least working to ease the tension.

“‘Voice’ isn’t enough?” they say, and Legundo keeps staring at that point in the air. He’s pretty sure he’s got their height down this time. He shakes his head when he catches up with the situation and realizes that answer was another question. Things seem to be going well, but still… he shifts his balance backwards slightly, ready to duck and run if needed.

“I don’t think it’s helping,” Legundo says, then pauses before adding emphasis to his next words. *“Either* of us.”

The voice makes a soft sort of *pfhh* sound and starts moving again – at first he thinks they’re moving towards him, but instead they pass right by him. “Maybe.”

Legundo twists to follow them, wincing when the gravel crunching loudly under his feet sounds a little *too* much like the sounds he’d heard earlier. “Maybe?”

“Maybe!” the voice says, fake cheer clouding over any real emotion that might be present. “I *dunno,* Legs. I’m starting to, I guess, kinda

commit to the bit? Y'know, the whole spooky presence, invisible guardian angel bit or whatever. Things like that don't have names. It's *fun."*

Legundo has quite possibly heard only a few more blatant lies in his life than this one. He presses on, following them around the corner. "Still, if we get separated –"

"– If we get separated, Legs, how are you gonna *know?"* The voice laughs, half tired and half empty. "And what use would a name be? Gonna ask the *cows* where I am?"

Legundo fixes them with a hard look. "I know what it feels like when someone's watching me," he says, flat. "And I know what it feels like when they *aren't.* So I'd like to know the name of the only semi-friendly thing around here."

The voice hums at that from where he assumes they're leaning against the wall – and then the sound moves backwards *through* the side of the house. Legundo blinks, stunned briefly – it's one thing to know the voice can walk through walls, but seeing it actually *happen* still catches him off-guard. He shakes off the brief shock and moves for the door, shooting a confused glare at the spinning torch that appears as he steps through the threshold.

The door clicks into place behind him, and they stand there in silence. Legundo patiently waits for an answer (a quiet intuition tells him that another question would crack the fragile foundation of trust they've built), watching sparks fly as the voice spins the torch back and forth.

When they do answer, it's thoughtful. Distant, like the question isn't *exactly* what they're wondering.

"When was the last time you were just with… *people,* Legs?"

Dangerous question. Dangerous answer. Legundo considers his options very carefully, and decides *might* be able to redirect the conversation back in his favor. "I thought you said you were a person and not, and I quote, 'a giant spider monster.'"

The voice snickers, which is good in the sense that they've taken the bait, and bad in the sense that Legundo knows very well when something strange is about to be spooky at him, and the voice's laugh was definitely *not* just amusement at the joke callback. "Getting attached to the disembodied voice, *huh?* You want to see eye-to-eye, you want me to have a *name,* you want me to be a *person?"*

Hm. He might've overshot the redirection – it's coming right back around to him, equally as dangerous as before. Legundo forces himself to relax enough to shrug at the voice and moves to lean against the edge of his bed, carefully placing his sword on his rumpled sheets.

"Thought you might appreciate it," he says, and does his best not to wince as the voice lets out a hollow laugh. "I would've."

The voice hums. The torch vanishes, and it takes Legundo a second to realize that something is *wrong.*

"Yeah, that's something, isn't it, *Legundo?"* the voice murmurs, barely a couple of inches right in front of him. Legundo begins to regret making a show of dropping his sword. "That *fun* little mysterious *backstory* you have, the one that *I* don't get to *know."*

Legundo copies their two tone hum, making what he hopes is eye contact with them. "Then let's make a deal. You tell me a name, I tell you part of the story."

Silence from the voice, and then their tone takes on an amused lilt, one that Legundo can *tell* is accompanied by a smile that just feels *slightly* off somehow. *"A* name?"

"Part of the story," Legundo says, doing his best to smile back and ignore the goosebumps crawling up his arms. "That way we can both keep lying to each other, y'know?"

"That works," the voice giggles, and Legundo can tell that little smile of theirs is steadily widening. "That *works!* Alright, Legs, I can *accept* that. That *works* for me."

Good. The conversation has tilted back into a much more natural place, and Legundo finds he's able to keep his smile where it is without much effort. Something finally gets to go his way. He raises a brow, trying to keep his expression somewhere between friendly and neutral. Trying to keep his face from being too readable, really, which he suspects the voice is reading right now anyway.

"Need a bit?" he asks.

"No," the voice chirps, "no, I think I *have* one."

Legundo squints at the immediate response. "Is it a name or a title?"

"I!" the voice says, sounding quite like they're waving their arms in

vague frustration. “No longer have one!”

…Legundo begins seriously wondering about those tangibility rules again, because right now he’s genuinely beginning to contemplate the logistics of socking the voice in the jaw. He folds his arms and glowers in their direction as they laugh from across the room.

“Even when I *purposefully* give you permission to be annoying and cryptic,” Legundo says, trying his best to sound annoyed instead of outright angry, “you *still* manage to find a way to piss me off and break the rules.” Maybe a bit too harsh. He sighs and does his best to make sure the sigh comes off as more exhausted than annoyed; throws his hands out to the side in a sign of resignation before dropping them down to grip the foot of the bed. Fine. The voice doesn’t have a name.

“Aw, *Legs,”* they say. They’ve moved while he wasn’t paying attention again, and now sound like they’re leaning on the wall by the front facing window. “It’s *fine,* just didn’t realize you were such a *stickler* for this sorta thing. Probably should’ve guessed it, actually. Other you’s *very* particular about these things too. Just means I gotta think a little longer is all.”

Legundo is just about ready to thank whatever high heavens exist that the piglin version of him happens to be just as precise in their wording as he is, therefore helping him come across as a normal sort of paranoid instead of an experienced in things like this, and then the voice keeps talking.

“Although,” they say, right back in that lower register again. “Am I *sure* I can trust you, Legs? Names have power, and all that.” Their nails drum against the window, timed almost exactly to the spaces between their words.

Legundo does his very best to unclench his jaw. “That would be why I’m giving you the option of a fake name.”

The voice giggles. Their nails tap the glass again. “It’s nice to have a Legundo who knows how to talk back. Usually it’s all, *augh, stop it,* or *I don’t like you very much,* so I guess that’s a good difference between you two. Anyway. A name.”

“A name,” Legundo echoes.

“Hmm,” the voice says, and Legundo can immediately tell they’re exaggerating their thought process to make sure he knows exactly

what they're doing, like they think he won't pick up on it otherwise. "Well. I like you, Legs. So how about… how about, you get a bonus, another piece of the puzzle. Part of the question other you doesn't even know he should have."

"The puzzle," Legundo repeats flatly, careful not to sound *too* interested.

The voice *tip taps* against the glass once more, and then Legundo twitches in surprise (not quite a flinch, more like a jolt of action) as they start talking from behind him this time, perched somewhere around his end table.

"Yeah," the voice hums, "the *puzzle.* You're not the *only* person who wants to know who I am, Legs."

Legundo's never heard more obvious bait in his life, or at least not in a very long time. He's also not fallen for that type of bait in a very long time, either, but he gets the feeling that if he doesn't at least *half* play along it'll ruin whatever setup the voice wants for their fake name reveal. He shuffles around a little, leaning forward on the bed instead of backwards, tilting his head towards the voice.

"And the name leads into that piece of the puzzle?"

The voice giggles, and Legundo watches closely as thin white claw marks dig into the wood of the table and draw closer, like they're leaning across it towards him.

"You can call me *Rex,"* the voice says, "and that'll work *just* fine."

…Huh.

Legundo lets himself sit with that information for a moment. Turns it over in his head to pick at the obvious piece of the puzzle (besides the fact that the name sounds a bit silly, like a dog's name – he *doubts* that's why they picked it). It takes a few moments longer for him to decide if and how he wants to nudge the voice for more information on the name, if they're even willing to divulge that kind of information. Either the conversation ends here, or he risks pushing a little further than might be acceptable.

"Is that name," he says, before he can lose his nerve, "past or present tense?"

The voice – *Rex* – hums and drums their nails against the end table

they're perched on, leaving little indents in the wood. *"Future.* Maybe past, but I'm not sure."

Legundo nods, and leaves it there. He's not sure how much further he can push without something breaking, and Rex seems pleased enough with their answer that Legundo doesn't particularly want to try and strong-arm more information out of them without giving them both some kind of break.

There's not really much to *say* after that though; it's been ten (eleven, actually, keeping proper count) days of him asking Rex to give any kind of information about themselves, and he finally has a halfway concrete answer. The fact that they even *did* give him some kind of answer is proof itself that they aren't part of Decem.

Of course, that *does* still leave Legundo with information he's expected to give – part of the story, part of *his* story. He cautiously shifts balance on his feet, waiting for Rex to finally speak up and start asking questions, but all he gets is a long, drawn-out hummed note and the sound of feet quietly hitting the ground.

"There's more mobs outside, I think," Rex mutters, not quite sounding like they're looking at Legundo while saying it. Right on cue, there's an awkward *thud* from the roof. "Didn't quite light up everything, huh, Legs?"

Legundo scowls. "You're so annoying."

"Aw, you love it," Rex chirps back. "Tell you what – how 'bout I go take care of those guys, and you go back to bed, yeah? Sound fair?"

"Sounds like you're letting me out of my side of the bargain," Legundo responds. Pointing out a loophole like this is risky, but it'll be much better for him to actually point it out than for Rex to be able to claim that he never followed through.

There's a quiet chuckle from Rex, and the sweeping sounds of someone dragging their feet across the ground. Clearly, they want Legundo to know *exactly* where they are. He follows their path with a raised brow, waiting for whatever vaguely ominous thing they're going to do or say next. (At least Rex has a brand Legundo can predict, even if he doesn't like it very much.)

The sword on Legundo's bed twitches before rising up, point dragging softly against the sheets as the hilt lifts at an angle. Legundo keeps himself from registering it as a threat and doesn't flinch as the sword

flicks upright, twirls a few times in the air, and then (after another flourish) is set back down, propped up against his bedside table.

“More like… well, you gotta specify the terms and conditions of the bargain, yeah?” Rex says, and the sword resounds with a little metal *ting!* as they tap against the blade. “No time limit. I fulfilled my end of the deal already. All that’s left is *you,* but – it’s late, I’m tired, you’re tired, and I don’t think I’m going to get much of a *story* out of you tonight, Legs. So: go to bed. I’ll call in the favor when I want. We can say –” they snicker “– it’s kind of an *IOU,* yeah?”

“We are absolutely not saying that,” Legundo says, not bothering to hide the pure disgust in his voice at the idea. “Goodnight, Rex.”

A very brief pause. “Technically past midnight, y’know. So, uh… good morning, Legundo.”

Legundo climbs into his bed, reaching out to make sure his sword is within reach. He doesn’t bother to pull up the sheets, just rests his head back on the pillows and takes his glasses off.

“Yeah. Good morning, Rex.”

Chapter End Notes

> Solar's note: get used to that name because it's going to be what V- i mean Rex goes by for like 75% of this fic. the guy really makes it hard to justify the character tags spoiling exactly who they are.
>
> also ummm comments are nice i like them

Chapter 10: 012

Chapter Summary

A sudden return to normalcy may be an ill portent.

Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Light stalking-adjacent implications. Severe physical violence in combat with a humanoid opponent.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Goooooood *morning!"*

Legundo wakes up to a disconcertingly cheerful voice, one so aggressively upbeat that even someone just waking up can tell it’s a forcibly affected tone. He scrunches up his face before replying.

“Rex.”

It’s a weird tone shift for them, although pretty much everything about Rex so far has indicated that weird tone shifts are their bread and butter. Still, it’s also a drastic tone shift – when he’d woken up yesterday, Rex had been *avoiding* him again.

“That’s my nickname, don’t wear it out!”

Legundo sighs and swings his legs out of bed, picking up the sword

leaning against it as he does so. He tilts his head to the side as he smells… something. Food? Well, non-meat food specifically – he'd managed to herd a few sheep over yesterday, but anything other than wheat has been hard to come by.

"Zombie dropped a potato, so we've got baked potatoes for breakfast!" Rex says, tone barely changing. Definitely faked, then, and not just Legundo's paranoia. He wonders what happened to the zombie Rex got the potato from, remembers the night before last, and immediately stops wondering.

"You planted it, right? These are bonemealed?" Legundo pulls his jacket back on and heads into the kitchen, half expecting to see Rex spontaneously materialized. He's not sure if he's relieved or disappointed when he instead sees a floating fork.

"Well, *ch'yeah,"* Rex says with a huff. "I'm not a total noob to the whole surviving thing!"

"Didn't say you were," Legundo responds, sitting down at the kitchen table. "People forget things easily when they're tired, though. And I know *for a fact* that I'm not the one spawning those phantoms."

Silence.

"I've slept enough," Rex says, after what is entirely too long of an awkward pause to be even remotely convincing.

"Tell that to the horrible insomnia birds."

"Y'know," Rex says, still forced-cheerful, "I'd do that if they *were* birds? *Which* they're *not."*

Legundo scrunches up his face and reaches for a baked potato, grabbing the spare fork on the table. "I *guess* they're more like undead flying manta rays, but we don't have those in vanilla."

"Yanno what we *do* have, though?" Rex's fork waves emphatically like they're trying to conduct a very small orchestra. *"Bats.* They're kinda like very big and very angry bats."

"Very big and very angry bats that are mad at you for not sleeping," Legundo fires back.

"Oh, we're still on that?" Rex says, and Legundo can hear the nervous smile in their voice. "Legs, *buddy,* I *promise* I'm getting enough sleep.

‘Sides, have you *seen* the materials I’m pulling in? You’ll never need rotten flesh again.”

“What I’ve always wanted,” Legundo says, as deadpan as he can manage. “More useless junk.”

Rex snickers at that. “Well, if you want less useless junk, howsabout we go looking for a village? You’ve got enough wood for fletcher stick trades, and I can bonemeal some wheat while you pack.”

Legundo considers this as he takes another bite of baked potato, eyeing the empty space where Rex’s voice is coming from. “Have you found one?”

“Nah,” Rex says, and brandishes their fork at him. “Been too busy keeping *you* safe.”

“Hate that,” Legundo immediately says, and scowls as Rex cackles in response. *“Hate* that. Why do you want me to find a village, anyway?”

Rex huffs. “Thought you’d be an expert at hardcore by now? We need their *stuff,* obviously. Fletcher trades, enchanted books, maybe nab that sweet enderpearl trade from a cleric if we can. The *usual.”*

“Doesn’t do me much good if the nearest village is five thousand blocks out,” Legundo says, standing up and setting his fork down on the table again. “Not like I have shulkers - I can only carry so much.”

“Two inventories,” Rex chirps, “twice as much stuff. *Very* helpful to have a friend, *isn’t* it!”

Legundo grimaces, trying his best to mask that instinctive expression by turning away and grabbing some bread for later. *Friend.* The voice – Rex – is calling themself Legundo’s *friend* now. He bites back the urge to retort with a *we’re not friends, you don’t even know me* – even with Rex trying to act cheerful, he doubts he’s going to get any reaction other than them *immediately* doing that creepy voice again.

“Full offense,” he says, “I’d still prefer a shulker box, since *they* don’t randomly say creepy things at me.”

Rex’s fork clatters onto the table, and Legundo barely catches the movement of the chair being pushed outwards before Rex’s voice is coming from behind him, like they’re sitting on the kitchen barrels.

“Are we going to the End?” Rex says. Their voice is slightly strained,

less like their earlier fake cheer and more with a sort of frantic hope.

Legundo's hand pauses over the sword in his inventory. "I was thinking about it."

A delighted gasp from Rex. "Aww, *Legs.* You *are* warming up to me! I thought I was gonna have to wait another *two weeks* to have this chat!"

Legundo moves his hand away from his sword, but stays on his guard. *"That's* ominous."

"What, me asking you to kill that dragon so I can stop being a disembodied voice?" Rex says. "No, Gundo, that's *business."*

Rex draws out the final word in the sentence with a sort of absolute satisfaction that hangs heavy in the room. Legundo is careful to not make any obviously nervous movements, instead faux-casually shifting from a fighting stance to move across the room and to the storage chests. He flips a random lid open to hide his face from Rex before he starts to talk again.

"I don't think I'm quite prepared yet," Legundo says, grabbing a stack of dirt out of the chest and dropping some spare wooden bits back in. "Iron armor only goes so far in hardcore, yeah? Best wait to get some enchants, or diamonds."

Rex doesn't say a word. Legundo keeps pretending to sort through chests, making sure to actually grab items that would be useful for a day out and away from the house. When he runs out of things to fake grab, he makes sure his face is back to a calm, neutral state before turning around.

"Sound good? We can find a village, or go mining, and *then* head to the End."

The silence remains in the house. Legundo glances towards the kitchen and the table, unsure of where Rex might've moved to.

He tries again. "Sound good?"

Tap. Tap. Tap. Right in the center of the room, about four blocks from Legundo. Like a shoe, or a sword, tapping on the ground, and Legundo can *feel* Rex's stare even before they speak.

"Heyyy, *Legs?* Why do you keep trying to lie to my face like you think

I won't *notice?"*

"What?" Legundo resists the urge to back up. Acting suspicious isn't going to help him here.

"I *said,"* Rex repeats, closing the distance between them by another block, *"why* do you keep *trying* to lie *to my face* like you think I won't *notice?"*

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Legundo says, and it's half true – pretending to not be nervous isn't exactly considered *lying,* so that *can't* be what Rex is referring to.

"Day five." Rex's voice falls into that soft, low register again. "You looked at your scrappy iron armor and told me – *directly,* mind you – that you've done it with less."

Legundo takes a moment to look shocked; let Rex read into that while Legundo figures out a way to move the conversation into his favor. Humor has been a good diffusion before. He spreads his hands in front of him, putting on a helpless expression.

"An offhand comment about my armor isn't –"

"Don't try that with me," Rex says, their tone exactly the same. "Don't try to lie your way around me, Legundo. I know you too well for that."

Legundo bites his tongue, and chooses his next words as carefully as he can. "It was *one* lie. I don't *keep* lying to you."

Rex laughs – that soft, horrible laugh that sends chills up Legundo's spine. *"Okay,* Legs. Then are you gonna share your story yet? A fake name for a fake story, remember?"

Or was that a lie, too? hangs unsaid.

Legundo can see a few ways out of the conversation. He chooses the safest one.

"I'd like to be a bit more geared up before I let *you,"* he says, and scrunches up his face before gesturing vaguely in Rex's direction. "Out? Into the world? With all due respect, of course."

Rex makes their next step forward very obvious, putting enough weight on one foot that the floorboards creak in protest. Legundo

keeps his footing, keeps his carefully manufactured expression.

“We,” Rex says, each word carefully enunciated, “have already *established,* Legs, that *deflection* is a *classic* tactic of yours. And with *all due respect,* I will not be falling for it.”

Some part of Legundo can’t help but wonder exactly how much respect *all due respect* is in Rex’s case, but it’s largely overshadowed by how much more difficult it has suddenly become to keep his face clear of fear.

He can tell Rex is waiting for an answer. The fact that they are invisible does nothing to lessen the weight of their stare, and Legundo presses his tongue against the back of his teeth as he searches for what to say next.

“You can’t shove me off a cliff this time, Legs,” they add thoughtfully. “So there goes *that* avoidance tactic.”

Legundo forces a laugh and shoves his hands in his jacket pockets. “I can *try,”* he says. “Besides, it’s not like me shoving you off a cliff actually did anything, did it?”

Rex whistles their two tone note, drawing the second note out into a descending whistle. “I took damage. But it’s not as if… Oh. I see.” They drift off. Legundo stares straight ahead, trying very hard not to read into that pause.

“Up here, remember?” Their voice is closer once again, just barely outside of what he’d consider his personal space, still soft and low and, notably, *definitely* coming from slightly above him. Legundo doesn’t change where he’s staring, and they keep talking anyway. “I *see.* You’re better at this than I gave you credit for, *aren't you.”*

“No idea what you’re talking about,” Legundo says. He’s starting to get a sense for Rex’s *back off* cues, just like Rex has clearly done already – and this is definitely one of those cues. They still have that kind of proud, smug tone, but it’s undercut by a very clear and obvious annoyance. He’s not sure what would happen if he pushes harder this time, and his self-preservation is telling him that he doesn’t *want* to know.

“No idea, yeah,” Rex agrees, and snorts. “Alright, Gundo.”

Legundo gives them a moment, just to see if they want to say anything else. When Rex stays silent, he nods and turns on his heel to make a

beeline for the door.

“Wh – hey hey *hey,* where are you going?”

Legundo pauses with his hand on the handle. “Out? Can’t exactly get a village or a mining trip from the comforts of the house.”

“You can’t just *walk out* on me!” Rex sputters, thoroughly thrown off by this reaction.

“I can,” Legundo says, opening the door, “and I wi – *never mind.”* He slams it shut again and presses his back to it. *“Pillagers.”*

“You’re in iron armor, Legs,” Rex says dryly. “You can handle a couple tax collectors.”

“Tax – no, you know what, not even gonna ask. A couple, yes. There are *nine* of them.”

“Nine?” Rex whistles, and Legundo tracks them as they move across the room towards him. *“Dang,* Legs, how many taxes have you frauded?”

“I don’t think it’s physically possible to do enough tax fraud to have *nine pillagers* outside my house,” Legundo responds, ducking down in an attempt to get out of line-of-sight from the windows – normally pillagers don’t sight players through glass, but the mobs in this world have been unusually intelligent and he doesn’t want to risk it.

“Quitter talk,” Rex responds, though their voice has also taken on a slightly tense undertone. “Bet I could spawn *ten.”*

“I’m sure you could,” Legundo hisses back from where he’s crouched, back against a cabinet, “but you’re also *invisible* and not going to get turned into a *pincushion* if you go outside.”

“We’ve also just gone over this, Legs,” Rex says, and Legundo hears the soft *clink* of someone tapping on the window. “I *do* still take damage.”

Legundo rests his head on the planks just under the windowsill, biting back the snappy comeback he *really* wants to say. He waits until he hears another tap against the glass before he trusts himself to speak.

“Can you at least distract them? Lead them in circles so I can get in a few axe crits?”

“Hm,” Rex says.

Tap. Tap.

“Hm,” Rex says again, and Legundo can feel their stare on him. “Illagers are pretty wary of spirits and the like, yeah? I’m a disembodied voice at the moment. I bet I could rile them up enough to follow me.”

“And then what?” Legundo whispers back. “I thought you didn’t want to fight them?”

Rex shrugs. “I’m not *gonna.* I’ll just convince them I’m a wandering weird spirit or something and there’s no players anywhere, and then they’ll turn around and leave.”

“I really don’t like the continued implications that you don’t count as a player,” Legundo says weakly, trying for tongue-in-cheek and somewhat missing the mark. “Not exactly helping the whole *I’m not a giant spider monster* argument.”

Tap. Tap.

“Legs, as much as I would *love* to continue our little running gag, *you’re* in hardcore and *I* don’t get to do that if you’re *dead.* Just trust me on this one, okay?”

There are very few things that Legundo has trusted less than this, but there’s enough of them that it doesn’t quite break into his top five. He breathes out slowly. “Okay.”

Tap.

And then, directly from outside, Rex’s cheerful voice.

“He- *llo,* tax collectors!”

Legundo hears the instant *thwack* as a crossbow bolt embeds itself in the wall outside. The illagers are muffled, enough so he can’t make out anything they’re saying to each other, but he can hear Rex loud and clear as they cackle.

“Yeah, I’ll take that,” they say, and Legundo listens to their voice travel to the path outside the house. “So, patrol, yeah? Big patrol, *big* patrol, let’s get everyone’s eyes over here, please and thank you! We will be heading towards spawn, yes, *spawn,* so anyone who went

exploring would know not to go that way."

The sound of another crossbow bolt being shot – Legundo hears the impact a second later in the distant clatter of gravel being scattered.

"Gentlemen, I am a *ghost,* please do *not* shoot at the ghost or I'll curse your bloodline! I'm just kidding. I can't do that. Or *can* I?" Another crossbow fires. *"Okay fine I was kidding!"*

Rex continues to ramble, and their voice gets quieter and quieter as they vanish towards the other end of the valley, decidedly *not* headed towards spawn. Legundo peeks up over the windowsill to do a quick headcount of the patrol. There *might* be nine of them there, but they're also a bit of a homogenous blob over the horizon. He counts again.

Eight. No bannerman.

Legundo flings himself out of the way just in time as the patrol captain who's stepped through the open door fires their crossbow at him. It *thuds* into the wall behind him with a heavy enough impact to send chips of wood flying.

Shield. Shield, shield. Legundo throws his shield out of his inventory and pulls it up to take the brunt of the next arrow. The iron head splits the wood and a jolt of pain goes up his arm, but Legundo moves forward, crouching as to keep his entire body behind the shield – if he can just get close enough to stab out his sword blindly, he might be able to get through this without taking too much damage. The captain grunts, and Legundo hears the next bolt being loaded into the mechanism.

He'll wait for the next shot. It'll give him enough time to get a good attack in.

There's a sudden clatter, and Legundo's eyes instinctively flick towards the noise as he braces for another impact. His brain catches the action, watching the crossbow slide over the floor and under his shield. The reasoning doesn't hit him until his own shield does.

The patrol captain slams the iron edge up into Legundo's face, sending stars through his vision. A second slam fills his mouth with the taste of blood, but Legundo is just barely able to react before the third blow hits him, throwing his arm out to the side and sending the captain staggering. They recover quick enough he can't retaliate, but their hands are at least off his shield.

They don't give him much time before rushing back into the fray. Their crossbow is still on the ground, but instead of reaching for it they throw a punch towards his head. Legundo sidesteps backwards, realizing a second too late there wasn't enough power behind their fist to mean anything. The captain grins something vicious at him as they reach across the inner side of his shield, grabbing the far edge and *yanking* it towards them. Legundo yelps in pain as the shield pulls his arm along, twisting it in a way that *definitely* feels like it's knocked him down a full heart.

Okay, shield needs to go. Legundo kicks out with his left leg, knocking his boot into the illager's knee. They back off out of instinct, and he takes the moment to take the shield off, grabbing it by the now-bloody edges and throwing it towards them. They duck out of the way, anticipating the throw, and it soars over their head, shattering the window and sending glass flying.

Legundo's eyes flick to the crossbow on the ground. He makes a move towards it, and the patrol captain recovers from their break in momentum to charge towards him, attempting to tackle him before he can get to it. Legundo pivots on the back of one heel instead of taking the extra step towards the crossbow and catches the pillager in the throat with the inside of his arm. They start to fall forward, unbalanced, and Legundo uses their own inertia against them, spinning to keep them in a headlock.

Their fingernails dig into his skin, hands scrabbling for any way to break his grip. Legundo keeps his arms firmly locked in place. One of their hands falls away after a second, giving him just enough time to brace before they elbow him in the ribs as hard as they can. He instinctively looks down towards the sharp pain in his side and realizes too late that he's fallen for the same trick they pulled earlier.

They slam their head up backwards into his face with full force, and Legundo feels something at the center of his face snap as his glasses fall off his nose and onto the ground. His grip on them loosens, and they take that split second to grab his wrist and pull him forward. He smashes to the ground, just barely managing to throw out one elbow in time to stop his already battered face from hitting the ground directly.

The patrol captain doesn't move to finish him off immediately. Legundo tries to sit up and finds a heavy boot at his neck instead, pushing downwards in an attempt to crush his windpipe.

He tries as hard as he can to push them off, arms bent awkwardly to try and grab at their leg. The boot stays firmly in place as his fingernails uselessly dig into its silver buckles. They apply a little more pressure, head tilted down towards him. They don't look cruel. They just look pleased. Like he's given them exactly what they want.

Legundo hates that.

In the corner of his eye, there's a blocky shape on the ground, resting next to him. He snaps out his free hand, throws his arm upwards, and pulls the trigger without bothering to aim.

It still sounds the same, he realizes a fraction of a second later. The bolt still sounds the same, whether it's hitting wood or flesh.

The pillager stares at him, wide-eyed. Their boot comes up off his neck as they bring their hands up to the wound in their gut. Legundo doesn't bother trying to get up – he knows a fatal wound when he sees one. He just stares back at them, waiting for them to turn to smoke and drift away, keeping one hand on the crossbow in case they try to go for it out of spite.

Their knees collapse out from under them first; they manage to catch themself with one hand before they can fall completely flat. They keep one hand pressed to their gut in a futile attempt to put pressure on the wound and reach out with their other hand – *no bannerman,* Legundo faintly recalls.

The patrol captain grabs his collar and attempts to haul him upwards with the last of their strength, wheezing something under their breath that Legundo's pretty sure he's heard before, and then he abruptly has to hold out his arms to catch himself as they vanish into dust.

His heart is pounding in his ears. His hands are shaking. Pretty much everything hurts. Considering how badly his nose is broken, he's pretty sure he looks like a murder scene. Probably because – he stares at the last few motes of dust as they drift away – he *is* a murder scene.

Legundo brings one hand up to his face, wincing. It's not the first time this has happened, and knowing his luck it's definitely not the last. He lets out a short hiss of pain as he snaps the cartilage back to its proper position and flicks his hands clean of the last of his own blood before he goes back to lying on the ground in the same place. He doesn't know what time it is. Maybe he can just go to bed here. The adrenaline is quickly leaving his system, and even the act of kicking the crossbow to the side feels sluggish and like he's under the effects

of mining fatigue.

It might be half a minute later. It might be hours later. Either way, Legundo doesn't move far from his spot on the floor, staring at the crossbow he's dropped to the ground. Either way, he still lifts his head when he hears the footsteps cross the threshold and stop in place.

"Hi Rex," he says. "Can you say something weird and offputting real quick so I can take my mind off the fact that I'm on three hearts right now?"

"Legundo, I left you alone for *five minutes,"* Rex says, stunned.

"Yeah. Patrol captain got into the house. Did you leave the door open?"

"I didn't *use* the door," Rex huffs.

"You didn't?" Legundo thunks his head back against the floor, and immediately regrets the decision. "Ow. Huh. Guess pillagers can open doors now."

"You're thinking of vindicators," Rex says, and Legundo is pretty sure they're crouched down next to him judging by the proximity of their voice. "Dude, did you get a concussion somehow?"

Legundo squints. "Pretty sure that was a pillager. It was the patrol captain."

Rex goes quiet, and Legundo closes his eyes to enjoy the bliss of silence. There's that weird thudding sound he's pretty sure is his heartbeat, but other than that, the house is peacefully silent.

Something prods at the collar of his shirt, and Legundo opens one eye to squint up at where he thinks Rex is.

"You weren't lying," they say in a tone somewhere between awed and exasperated. "Congrats on the Bad Omen, Legs. Guess we're not going village hunting anytime soon."

"I'll try not to get jumped by a door-opening CQC expert next time," Legundo says dryly.

"Very funny," Rex replies, matching his deadpan tone. "About as funny as the fact that you keep managing to weasel your way out of telling me what's actually going on with you."

Legundo allows himself a small smile at that one, closing his eyes again. “No idea what you’re talking about.”

Chapter End Notes

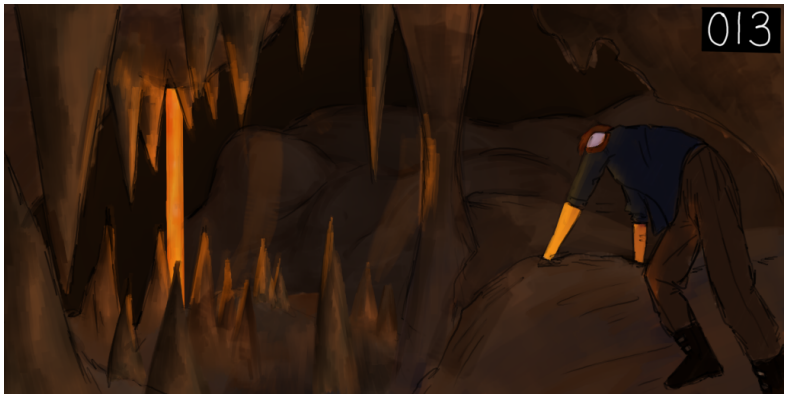
Solar's note: i sent fluffy the message "bsch is already better than datd because datd doesn't have an extended close-quarters combat fight to the death with an illager" when we first finished writing this chapter. i love writing fight scenes, you guys.

anyway i'm sure this was just a random one-off fight scene for fun and there's absolutely no foreshadowing whatsoever in this chapter. i would definitely never hide a bunch of foreshadowing in light banter or in the middle of a fight. who do you think i am, someone writing a longform multichapter fic?

Chapter 11: 013

Chapter Summary

Compounding bad luck only ever results in calamity.



Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Brief description of an area with several large spiders. Semi-detailed descriptions of death and injury in extended combat with both humanoid and nonhumanoid creatures. Major character death.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Dear future Legundo,” Legundo says, setting a cobweb on fire with his torch. “Next time, don’t get Bad Omen, so you aren’t stuck in a mineshaft with Rex.”

“I think we should do this more often!” Rex chirps, impaling a cave spider on the end of their sword. It screeches before puffing into dust. “Very fun activities to do with your friends. Fighting off abnormally intelligent spiders is a *great* pastime, haven’t you heard? All the cool kids are doing it!”

Legundo grimaces and kicks the next cave spider in the head, sending the horrible little thing backwards. “You can walk through walls. You couldn’t find *any* better way through here?”

“You’re the one against strip mining,” Rex says. “Besides, *I’m* the one that can walk through walls. *You* can’t.”

The fire finally catches, lighting up the frame of the mineshaft. The wave of cave spiders that had been waiting in the shadows scuttle backwards, and Legundo pushes forward to sink his pickaxe into the spawner. Another spider hisses and lunges, but Rex’s sword flashes in the darkness before it can sink its fangs into him. Legundo silently thanks them for keeping him from being poisoned – he wouldn’t ever say it out loud, because they’d be creepy about it, but he *is* grateful he doesn’t have to walk around on low hearts nursing a nasty bite wound.

The cage falls apart underneath him, and Legundo scoops up the handful of experience orbs that trail after him.

Another spider goes silent and still under Rex’s sword. The voice laughs at it, and Legundo watches with thinly veiled disgust as one of the spiders launches at him and stops midair, wriggling its legs as it tries to snap at him. Rex slams the thing into the wall with a gross *squorch* noise – he may have been able to turn away in time to not see the impact, but that sound leaves *no* doubt in his mind that there are probably spider guts splattered across the stone in the brief moment between the impact killing it and the mob’s corpse poofing entirely.

“Seriously,” he repeats. “No better way?”

He can guess Rex is shrugging at him, by the moment of silence. “Not unless you want to become a disembodied voice, Legs.”

Legundo squints at him. “Is that a death threat?”

“Legundo. *Buddy*. I can only say ‘you’ll know if I want you dead’ in so many ways.”

He looks away, back into the now-empty dark of the cave. The other cave spiders have mostly retreated for now, no doubt to go rebuild their webs. If there’s one upside to having hyper-intelligent mobs, it’s that *sometimes* they end up figuring out that they need to cut their losses and leave him alone. That *does* force him to sit with the paranoia of knowing there’s something out there that has unfinished business with him, but he figures it’s better than having new things take him completely by surprise – six of one, half a dozen of the other.

“And *there’s* his thinking slash paranoia face,” Rex helpfully supplies, and Legundo watches their sword spin in a circle. *“Seriously?* It’s been

two weeks and you *still* don't trust me?"

"You sound like someone hiding a knife behind their back being really offended that someone pointed out they were hiding their knife badly," Legundo informs them. "I'll trust you when you stop hiding a knife behind your back."

"For the record, it's a *sword,"* Rex says snippily, and twirls it again for good measure. "Although, when you think about it, what is a sword if not a really big knife?"

"Scholars across the multiverse are going to invade this world and come for your head on the basis of that joke alone," Legundo responds gravely. "You're hopeless. I don't know how to explain how wrong that is."

"It's 'cause you can't and I'm right."

Legundo crushes another cave spider underfoot before it can scuttle any closer to him, wincing at the noise it makes. "Don't blame me when a grumpy medieval historian attacks you with a broadsword while you try to tell them all about how it's actually a dagger for giants."

"A noble way to die."

Legundo snaps his fingers as they turn the corner in the mineshaft. "I *get* it now! You're not a *complete* enigma, you just have the definitions of *stupid* and *noble* mixed up somehow."

"It's a terrible disease called 'I like to help people,'" Rex says dryly. "Doctors tell me it's incurable and terminal. *I* prefer the term *built different."*

"If it's terminal, could you die any quicker?"

"Ha."

There's something in Rex's tone that makes him want to back off. Something just a *little* too similar to other conversations, where Legundo has the feeling of standing on a very precarious cliff with Rex. He looks away from the spinning sword and towards the darkened hallways of the mineshaft. Just a little too enclosed for his liking, but they haven't passed by many caves for Legundo to go explore.

“Soo. Have *you* ever died?” Rex says, slightly too quickly to sound natural. “I mean, like, you said this isn’t your first hardcore world. Have you died in the other ones, or did your stalker chase you out?”

“Never died,” Legundo says, and allows himself a wry grin at that. “There was a close call with an owl one time, but other than that it’s been smooth sailing.”

Rex’s voice is so skeptical that Legundo can’t help but imagine a cartoon ghost comedically squinting at him. “Owls aren’t in vanilla?”

“Hey,” Legundo responds, “I never said I only do *vanilla* hardcore worlds.”

“So your stalker chases you out,” Rex says, ignoring Legundo’s excellent conversation hook that he’d thought for *sure* would have successfully diverted the conversation. “And you get scrambled to the next world, or maybe pulled slash pushed there, and *then* it’s only a matter of time before they find you again and do the exact same thing. Oh, that is *interesting.* I figured you were intentionally on the run, but they *really* don’t give you any other option, *do* they?”

Rex’s guess – he *hopes* it’s a guess – is entirely too accurate for Legundo’s comfort. There’s nothing he can say here that doesn’t give away *far* too much information. He goes back to staring at the wall, hoping his silence will at least give away *less.*

“Gotcha.” Rex says in that sing-song voice of theirs. ”Think I’m owed a story yet, Legundo?”

“I’ll let the next cave spider bite you,” Legundo says. Cramped. Stuck in a space with a voice that is guessing too many things about him. It’s starting to feel uncomfortably familiar.

“You and I both wish they *would* bite me,” Rex says bitterly. “But no, really. Stalkers and obsidian towers. The more I figure out about you, Legundo, the more I want to know.”

“All the more reason for me to keep my secrets,” Legundo says. “See, that’s the thing. If you keep pushing it, you get nothing. If you actually *listened* to me, I might actually start to trust you enough.” A little too pushy. A little too panicked. It’s the best he can do under such short notice, but he *knows* Rex can tell he’s trying desperately to move on from the subject.

Rex goes silent. Legundo watches the wall in front of him crumble

open as the deepslate gives way and opens up into another, darker space. He strides forward, holding out his torch to try and light the new mineshaft corridor, and nearly stumbles over the walkway and into an abyss.

The cavern in front of them is *huge,* far too large to be illuminated by one measly torch – he can just barely make out a couple of lava lakes far below and past them. Thin, variegated columns not nearly thick enough to realistically support any weight connect the ground and the ceiling. The dim bioluminescence of glowsquids in aquifers helps to show the shape of the upper caverns, but only *barely*.

Legundo moves to take a step forward and stops halfway as his boot crunches uncomfortably against the irregular surface. The ground isn't pebbly or smooth anymore, it's irregular and sharp. He looks up to the dark ceiling – it may be hard to make out details in the darkness, but he can pick out stalactites the size of endermen here and there. The cavern hangs empty. Like an open maw.

He takes a step back, readjusting. Agoraphobia doesn't usually hit him particularly hard, but Rex has already thrown him for a loop, and now the change from an enclosed environment to *this* is making him dizzy.

"Legs –" Rex starts. Half frustrated and half worried.

"Look!" Legundo says, very purposefully talking over Rex and forcing excitement into his voice. "Diamonds, down there. I bet you already have some, but I might as well get my first shinies." He can *tell* they're glaring at him, but he's starting to reach that point where he's already too intimidated to be *more* intimidated.

He steps down off the side of the mineshaft platform, inching his way along the cavern wall towards slightly flatter and therefore safer ground, and then freezes as the splotchy marking on his neck starts to feel uncomfortably warm and itchy. "…Uh, Rex?"

The war horns answer the unspoken question for him.

"Well, there's our village!" Rex says, with an equally forced amount of cheerfulness. "Hey, look on the bright side – I can just head up there, put some people under house arrest, and then once I've dealt with everything for you we'll have trades we can set up!"

"Counterpoint," Legundo says. "We're at deepslate. We shouldn't *be* in raid spawning radius."

“Hm,” Rex says. “Someone should’ve told the illagers that before they went to all the trouble of spawning in, then.” Legundo gets the distinct feeling they’re gesturing somewhere, which is a bit useless when they’re invisible.

The echo of the war horns finishes bouncing around them, and Legundo takes stock of what he has. Iron armor and iron weapons with zero enchantments. Arrows but no bow, a half-broken shield, and a couple stacks of stone. They probably don’t have the supplies to wait out the raid, and there’s no way they can get up to the surface in time to do damage control. He might not even have enough food to last through *one* wave of the illagers. A few solid hits from a vindicator and he’s dead.

So, really, this is a typical Wednesday for Legundo. He swaps his torch out for his sword and grits his teeth before turning to where he’s pretty sure Rex is.

“I need you to hold off the first wave,” he says, keeping his voice steady. “Just the first wave. Give me enough time to make a bow, get up on a platform, get myself ready for this.”

“I’d rather hide you in a hole and take care of all of them myself,” Rex says. “I probably could. Maybe. The ravagers might be a problem.”

“First wave won’t have ravagers,” Legundo says, aware of every ticking second until the raid starts. They probably have, what, 30 seconds? Less? “Keep the last guy alive for a while, if you can. Any time you can buy will help.”

Rex clicks their tongue. “Yeah, okay. Get a little further down into the cave before you make your platform. I’ll start drawing the second wave towards you.”

Legundo doesn’t bother to say thank you. He dashes for the tiny entrance back to the mineshaft, silently cursing himself for burning the cobwebs out of their way instead of cutting through them. At least there’s still a few remaining in out-of-the-way corners – Legundo hacks at them with his sword, preserving as much string as he can. He can hear spiders moving through the other mineshaft tunnels nearby, skittering across the walls and ceiling. Any other time, that sound alone would be enough to give him nightmares, but at this point he’s too stressed for it to even register.

He sets down his crafting table. Bends the sticks into place, loops the still-sticky string around the notches in the newly formed branch. The

sound of a crossbow echoes through the cavern. His hands falter for a moment, fumbling a first attempt at finishing out the bowstring. Seconds wasted, but right now seconds are what matter.

Legundo throws himself back into the cave, casting around for signs of combat – for movement in general, really.

Another crossbow going off, this time identifiably from below. He can hear Rex talking, too far away and too muffled by the sound of weaponry for any words to be made out. He counts the heads. One vindicator. Four pillagers. Not very promising, considering he'd been expecting Rex to have handled most of them by the time he returned. He still takes a little joy in it, though, because there's a little spiteful part of him – the one that had to fistfight a pillager captain yesterday – that kind of wants to see them get roughed up a bit.

Unfortunately for that spiteful part of him, Rex's invisibility seems to be a *significant* advantage in this situation. He can't track their figure, but the bright blue glint of a diamond sword clues him into their location. They dance through the crowd, parrying the vindicator's axe strike and shoving them backwards before bringing the sword down onto them. Legundo allows himself three seconds to be bitter that Rex didn't tell him they'd found diamonds before turning his attention back to the fight.

Four pillagers left. The sword weaves back and forth as the remaining raiders attempt to fire on their invisible opponent and seemingly only succeed in hitting each other. One of them turns to dust, clutching an arrow in their gut; another is either shoved or kicked directly into a crossbow shot. Rex takes the second-to-last one out and then backs away from the sole survivor, a pause that suggests they're casting a nervous glance up towards Legundo to check if he's ready.

Legundo nocks an arrow and nods to them, carefully lining up a potential shot. Rex's sword waves back and then slices into the final pillager's neck. He winces sympathetically – that *can't* feel good.

"How many arrows?"

He checks his pockets. "Forty-eight."

"That's not enough!"

"I *know* it isn't, but I'm not a skeleton or a pillager and I can't just magically make arrows appear out of thin air!"

“You’ve got a skeleton *inside* you, why doesn’t *that* count?” It’s a weak joke, a brief bit of forced levity as the time ticks down to the next wave.

The horns sound again. Rex’s sword vanishes, presumably as they get to a better position. Legundo casts his gaze around the cavern, desperate to try and find something he can do to help without calling attention to himself. He has limited ammunition and needs to save it for when the evokers come into play, and calling out hostiles will tell Rex very little while telling the illagers exactly where their primary target is. He scans the cave, hoping a stray skeleton will be nearby – he could use an arrow drop right about now.

He’s kicking himself for not having kept that crossbow. It didn’t have particularly high durability, but he had the materials for rockets. Explosives would make a world of difference right about now.

“Ow!” Rex hisses, and Legundo’s eyes snap back to the fight. Four vindicators, five pillagers – that’s the maximum amount that could possibly spawn, because of course it is. Rex’s sword wavers in the air before vanishing entirely as the pillagers fire at their retreating form. One of the arrows grazes a vindicator, tearing a strip through their jacket. They snarl at the pillager who hit them. Legundo crosses his fingers.

They don’t raise their axe. They just make an infuriated gesture at the pillager and go back to trying to hit an invisible target with a little bit more rage than before. Legundo grimaces. Apparently some of the vindicators have learned healthy anger management strategies, as if their increased tactical prowess wasn’t already worrying enough. At least the pillagers mostly still have bad aim and worse trigger discipline.

Diamond flickers through the shadows, sweeping around a vindicator’s ankles. They fall, clutching at where the gash has severed their tendons. Rex snickers and sinks back into the floor, stabbing at another one of the pillagers through the ground; they back up and fire at the ground. Arrows stick into it.

Arrows stick into it. Normally, Legundo calls any arrows fired by mobs a lost cause; they’re rarely sturdy enough to survive being yanked out of the surface they’re in, let alone the additional strain of being shot again. If the pillagers are smarter, though, there’s a good chance that they know how to make and fire arrows to be reusable. All Legundo has to do is make himself worth wasting ammunition on.

Finally, something he's good at.

Legundo hops down from the mineshaft entrance, making sure he lands in an area free of any large spikes – none of the stalagmites here are any bigger than his head, but they'll do. He raises his pickaxe and sets to hacking off several of the smaller ones at the bases. He rests his shield on his off arm, shuffles to the edge of the cliff at this layer of the cave, and takes aim.

"Rex, *duck!"* he yells, and lobs a spike down into the fray below.

It strikes a pillager in the shoulder. He's pretty sure it doesn't do any numerical damage, but they stagger slightly as the rock shatters against their pauldron. Their friends swing their crossbows up towards him, and he manages to throw his shield up in time to catch four whole arrows. Legundo peers around the metal edge of the shield, lowering it as he ducks behind a column to break line of sight.

Four arrows. Apparently their aim's nearly perfect when they can actually see their target. He yanks them out of his shield and nocks one in his bow, pocketing the other three. He squints down as he lines up his shot and the unfamiliar fletching tickles the edge of his nose slightly.

He shoots. It hits one of the vindicators directly in the forehead right as a diamond sword sticks through their chest. They turn to smoke, and Legundo throws himself behind the column again as the next volley of arrows comes towards him.

Flint and iron heads scatter off into the dark. Legundo gives up trying to find those ones, instead resting the next arrow on the string.

"Gundo!" Rex calls, and Legundo winces as they yelp in pain. *"OW!* Stupid! Forehead! Go back to the mineshaft!"

He's not quite sure if Rex is using precious time to make fun of his hairline or if it's a creative insult towards the illagers. Still, the second arrow's already nocked and his shot's already lined up, so he might as well fire at the raid again before he tries to move.

"I'm going to aim for another vindicator," Legundo calls down. He tries to remember where he saw them last, knowing the pillagers are going to fire the second he shows himself. "Make sure you're in the ground or off to the side, okay?"

Rex doesn't answer. Legundo takes that as a yes, throwing himself

back out into the empty air. He releases the shot and hits the ground immediately afterwards, ducking just in time to avoid the incoming volley. A dripstone spike pokes into his shoulder, but he'll take that over taking two arrows directly to the chest – the pillar behind him is looking a little worse for wear, two bolts sticking out of it right where Legundo had been standing.

"Go *back* to the *mineshaft,"* Rex repeats, and Legundo scrambles away, not expecting their voice to be so close. They must be halfway in the ground, right in front of him. "I can handle the raid, Legs."

"They've hit you a couple times already," Legundo hisses. "They're not stupid, Rex. They *know* you're here."

Legundo can almost make out a face in the darkness scowling at him, even though he knows it's just the texture of the dripstone column a few blocks away. The illusion is ruined when a hand grabs the back of his collar and yanks him behind the stalagmite again.

Their voice comes from slightly above him. "Then I'll kill them all, and the *next* group of guys can figure out how to deal with the intangible voice."

"Invisible," Legundo says. "Not intangible. How many hearts are you down?"

"One," Rex says, and catches themself. "I – Legs, *buddy.* At *least* get to a vantage point. I won't say no to you fighting if you've figured out how to conserve ammo, but you've gotta be *smart* about it. Back up to the mineshaft, and I'll funnel you the leftover arrows between waves."

Legundo opens his mouth to respond and instead yelps in surprise as heavy-duty boots smash into the ground right next to his leg. The vindicator growls in frustration, raising their axe, and Legundo stops thinking – he sweeps his leg sideways, wincing as his ankle hits the vindicator's boots at a bad angle. They wobble, thrown off by the weight of the axe they'd been brandishing with one hand, and Rex lets out a wordless yell. Legundo watches as the vindicator is *pulled* sideways over the edge of the platform with the same back-of-the-collar grip Rex had just used on him. They only fall three blocks before they're out of sight, but the meaty *crunch* noise they make on impact leaves very little question as to if they survived the fall. He winces.

"Mineshaft," Rex pants. *"Now."*

He doesn't particularly feel like arguing with Rex the Impaler anymore. He nods, scrambling back into the mini maze of dripstone. It takes a little bit of blind navigation, but he's able to get up onto one of the stalagmites, hopping from it to another pillar and then up a couple blocks onto the mineshaft platform. The wood creaks under his feet as he turns and readies his next shot.

The pillagers are still aiming at the rock he'd been hiding behind and waiting patiently for him to emerge. Legundo takes the extra time to eye a potential shot between them and towards where the last vindicator is parrying the floating diamond sword.

No clear shot – Legundo will just have to hope Rex has that covered. He aims back down at the two pillagers, releasing the first arrow and quickly following up with the final stolen arrow. By the time he's managed to shoot both of them down, the vindicator has vanished into dust particles.

"Rex?" Legundo calls. "Still alive?"

"Who's Rex?" Rex says, their voice echoing through the cave. "I'm the spirit of that dead guy that beat you up."

Legundo doesn't dignify that one with a laugh. Instead, he pulls out his stack of arrows, carefully tying the leather quiver to his belt. He'll have to make each one count, at least until the next wave is over and Rex can ferry him the spoils.

"Arrows," Rex says, voice *directly* next to him again. Legundo flinches instinctively, but they don't respond – their tone is a bit more serious than usual. A bundle of arrows hang in the air next to him, and he takes them hesitantly.

"Why are you up here?"

"Because I am *not* going 1v1 with a ravager," Rex responds with a huff. "You're gonna shoot it for me first."

Legundo bites back his immediate rude response to think. Rex probably has a point, but Legundo still doesn't like losing his stealth position so soon into the wave.

"I –"

"Legs, buddy, the *trust* thing," Rex says. "I'm good! I'm *not* good enough to take down a ravager by myself. I appreciate the vote of

confidence, but I don't have armor on right now and you'll be at a distance. That ravager is *way* more of a problem for me than it is for you."

Legundo blinks. His mind lags a precious second as it tries to catch up with what Rex has said. "You're not wearing *armor?"*

"Invisible," they say, stretching out each syllable. "Can't get hit if nothing can see me, right?"

Legundo isn't too sure about that. He quietly slings the quiver through his belt loops, pulling the leather straps tight around each other. No armor, against the… the *everything.* The enderman, the phantoms, now the illagers. Without armor, a few solid swipes from *anything* would kill Rex – even *Legundo* could probably manage it in a couple axe crits.

Legundo starts nocking an arrow and is interrupted by Rex furiously smacking his shoulder.

"Ravager, lower tunnel! C'mon, start shooting!"

"Stop telling me what to do," Legundo mutters, drawing the fletching back to his nose. The shadow down in the tunnel has become much clearer; he can see the ravager's horns scratching white lines into the deepslate as it stomps out of the cave and roars. Legundo waits until the ravager's mouth has closed to fire, listening to the sound echo around the cave.

The arrow strikes true, embedding itself in the center of the thing's forehead. It roars again, hooves pounding on the rock as it shakes the arrow out. Legundo takes a second to breathe and then immediately has to throw up his shield as the pillagers on the ground open fire.

Not a second too soon, either, as four arrows slam into his shield faster than he would've been able to dive for cover behind a rock. A fifth arrow whizzes over his head and snaps against a piece of dripstone behind him, knocking it loose.

"Give me your shield." Rex demands.

Legundo does his best not to freeze and focuses on tugging one of the arrows out from his shield. "What?"

"We do not have time for you to question everything I do," Rex says. Their voice is steadily reaching an octave that Legundo has come to understand means sheer stress. "Classic battle strategy. An archer, and

someone to hold the shield to protect them. Your firing rate depends on you not having to constantly –"

"I'm not giving you my shield, Rex." Legundo snaps, and fires another arrow down at the ravager. "Why don't you have one of your own?"

"Invisible!" Rex snaps back. "Stop asking questions!"

Legundo shakes his head and fishes an iron ingot he'd found in the mineshaft out of his pocket. He tosses it towards Rex and uses the same motion to catch the next volley of arrows with his other arm. All five hit the wood this time, clustered in an alarmingly small circle.

"You have an axe," he says to Rex. "Go get wood from the mineshaft supports."

"Nope." Rex responds just barely short of cutting off Legundo's sentence. *"Absolutely* not. If they hit you, or if one of the vindicators makes it up here, you're dead."

"That's why *I* have a *shield,"* Legundo says, enunciating each word for emphasis. "Just do it quick, and then I can have the ravager down by the time you're back and we'll both have shields for the rest of the raid."

The iron ingot vanishes, hopefully into Rex's inventory. "You're insufferable."

"I'm alive, aren't I?" Legundo says with a smile. His next arrow hits the ravager's front leg, right on target. "Shield. Go."

Rex doesn't respond, which Legundo chooses to take as a sign that they've decided to go along with his non-suggestion.

Without any interruption from Rex, Legundo easily settles into a regular groove of combat. Shoot, pull up the shield, take the hit, pull out an arrow or two, line up his shot, and fire. The ravager shakes most of the arrows out, leaving bloodied arrowheads and snapped shafts littering the rock floor, but it's mostly standing still and it's making his job significantly easier. The initial panic at the ravager's appearance ebbs, leaving Legundo focused on a very simple task. Nock. Shoot. Shield.

It takes far fewer arrows than he's expecting. Only about a dozen arrows are missing from his quiver, with the thirteenth nocked on the string. He squints down the shaft, watching the ravager carefully, and

releases.

The ravager doesn't even have time to roar. The arrow thuds deep into its neck, and the beast dissolves into white smoke.

Legundo allows himself a bit of a smug smile. The pillagers are still firing at him, but he's taken out the biggest threat of this wave.

An axe interrupts his thoughts, the iron blade sinking into his shield like it's made of butter and cleaving a corner off the wood. Legundo doesn't waste a second, pushing back against that momentum to spin around to his attacker and smack them in the face with the bow grip. His knuckles smash against their jaw satisfyingly, but the vindicator takes the hit and shakes it off, sneering at him. They spin their axe and raise it again for another hit.

The edge of another shield slams into the side of their neck before they can follow through. They make a gurgling sound, and Legundo watches as Rex shoves them off the platform, particles dissipating as they fall directly onto another vindicator.

"This is why I can't leave you alone!" Rex says.

"This is why you should've had a shield," Legundo snips back.

Rex grumbles something, probably a snarky response, but Legundo is more focused on dodging the infuriated pillagers down below to actually hear it. He moves to pull the arrows arrows out, pausing when Rex raps their knuckles on his battered shield.

"Wish me luck!" They chirp, sour mood apparently gone. Legundo watches their shield move backwards and then throw itself forward off the cliff edge, downwards into the fray below. A witch – one he hadn't seen in the commotion – sprawls out on the floor, a shield trapping their arm and a sword pinned through their shoulder.

Unfortunately, the attack doesn't seem to have finished them off. Rex raises their sword for a killing blow, and Legundo doesn't manage to yell out a warning before they shake a vial of poison out of their sleeve and smash it against the ground. Rex lets out a (hopefully surprised) yelp as the smell of sickly sweet poison fills the air and brings their sword down, finishing off the witch.

"You okay?" Legundo shouts down, and then regrets it instantly. His hesitation stops him from raising his shield fast enough to block the next volley fully – one of them grazes his side as the rest of them slam

into his shield. He bites his tongue against the pain. It's just a surface wound – he's had worse as recently as yesterday.

"I'm good!" Rex yells back up, sword whirling and swinging at the pillager that *technically* just shot Legundo. "I'll take care of these guys, heal up!"

Legundo doesn't like taking direct orders, but he's also not keen on dying anytime soon.

He crams a roll of bread into his mouth as fast as he can, tearing off chunks with his teeth as the sounds of fighting slowly dwindle. The gash in his slide doesn't heal back over to smooth skin, but the irritated red mark is a decent sign that it'll heal over with a little more saturation. At least *something* is working out right for him.

The cave falls silent. Legundo swallows down the rest of the roll, wiping away the crumbs on his pants before he peeks out over the edge of the mineshaft to the cave floor below.

No pillagers. Just a sword and shield floating in the air beside a few discarded crossbows.

"Next wave three witches," Legundo calls down.

"Three witches, three vindicators, six pillagers, given our luck," Rex responds, and then hisses in pain. "Ow. Ow."

"Get up here," Legundo says. "Otherwise you're gonna die and I'll have to give a eulogy about how stupid you were."

Rex laughs. The sound echoes sharply in the cave. "Oh, ye of little faith."

The first witch spawn barely three blocks from Rex, and they lunge towards each other. Rex's sword narrowly deflects a slowness potion, sending it towards another of the witches, then sinks into their target's shoulder. The third witch counts their odds and throws down a poison potion of their own, coating the entire group in the toxin.

Legundo winces sympathetically, but turns his attention towards counting damage ticks and firing off choice shots at any of the witches that are low enough to die in a few hits. Before long, there's only one left, and they should be at half a–

"Sorry!" Rex yells, shocking Legundo out of his focus. "You're gonna

have to handle this wave on your own!"

Before Legundo can process exactly what that means, the remaining witch pulls out a splash potion of harming and smashes it directly into where Rex's chest would be, splattering the caustic liquid over both of them. The witch fades relatively quickly, dust blowing away in the movement of feet on the ground.

Rex appears to stay standing for just a heartbeat more, long enough for Legundo to hope that what he thinks is about to happen won't happen, and then their sword and shield abruptly vanish in a puff of particles.

The world lurches. Legundo has to grip the edge of the platform to keep himself from falling off the mineshaft, gritting his teeth as his vision blurs out badly. He'd almost like to call it a familiar feeling, but this is only equivalent to Decem's presence in a world in the loosest way possible.

One thing in common – it feels like something has been shaken loose and shattered on impact.

Legundo's vision clears before his mind does, and he moves instinctively, bringing up his shield to catch a volley of arrows. Vindicators coming up the slope from the side again, judging by the movement off to the side. He's still not processing what has happened, even as he crouches down and opens fire on the vindicators, shifting his position so a few arrow hits send them tumbling into the dripstone spires below.

One of them lets out a deathrattle as they fall, one Legundo's pretty sure would result in him getting Bad Omen again if he were anywhere nearby. They must have hit a stalagmite or two on their way down.

Two vindicators left. He's midway through continuing to open fire, hunkering behind his shield as he does so, and as the second one vanishes with an arrow through their shoulder, the weight of exactly what's happened finally hits him.

Rex is *dead.*

Legundo raises his shield to catch another volley of arrows, head spinning again. It's been thirteen days, and something he'd come to see as an unfortunate constant of the world has up and *died* on him, just like that.

It's not like they'd been *pleasant* to be around, but still, they'd been some form of companionship in an uncaring world (he fires down at the last vindicator as they start approaching the slope again, catching them between the eyes), and they'd *almost* started to form a kind of rapport with each other.

He hadn't even held up his end of their bargain, and that somehow smarts more than if they'd just started holding it over his head. He could've told them something about himself. It probably wouldn't have stopped them from dying to a witch, but he can pretend.

Just the pillagers again. Denial becomes a focused sort of anger, and Legundo falls back into his previous rhythm of nock-shoot-shield with a sort of desperation. They're outranged, and having the high ground means his arrows have just a little bit of extra energy behind them. The bowstring snaps in his hands as his last arrow hits one of them in the chest.

Good. Next wave. He's already starting to forget what happened, and then a second raid horn shocks him out of his rhythm again as he restrings his bow. That's… not right.

He stares down at the cave floor below in muted shock. One witch. Two evokers. Ten vindicators. Thirteen pillagers, one on a ravager.

The worry had been in the back of his head the entire time – he's somewhat aware of how raid farms work, that they spawn multiple waves at once by sending the previous ones out of range from their targets. He'd been vaguely cognizant of the fact that this *could* happen with a cave floor this far down, but he'd hoped they were safe when the first four waves hadn't overlapped.

One of the evokers catches his eyes and flicks their wrist, sending vex spiraling into the air, and Legundo scrambles back. He *wants* to stand and fight, feels almost *obligated,* but he's still in iron armor and now he's *alone.* There's no way he's getting out of this one alive if he does something that stupid – he's going to have to cut his losses.

Legundo swallows his pride past the strange lump in his throat that he tells himself is just temporary shock and dashes away into the mineshaft before the other evoker sees him.

Chapter End Notes

> Solar's note: may have cursed myself by saying we had enough backlog to move regularly for every other week, because school's

getting busy and i didn't get any writing done over break. and also i joined a recursive fic exchange? that's okay though, i'll get it done, please believe in me. and if not then please be patient with me, god isn't finished with me yet and i'm not finished with that bastard yet either.

be gay, do minecraft, leave kudos if you enjoyed and a comment if you want to yell, seriously i love talking about little tiny details in this thing like you would not BELIEVE, also no i don't know why fluffy keeps acting possessed in the author's notes but i'm sure that's nothing to worry about, right? right????
--
Fluffy's note:

queen’s gambit, anyone?
or maybe it’s more of a pawn’s gambit.

Chapter 12: 014

Chapter Summary

Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Portrayal of grief over major character death. Light stalking-adjacent implications. Extended description of a panic attack and touch-based overstimulation.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This time, Legundo isn't awoken by any sudden noise. Instead, a sudden awareness of how *quiet* it is causes him to jolt upright in bed.

It's dawn. It might even be earlier than that, considering the blue-tinted light barely seeping in through the windows. Legundo blinks at the blurry ceiling and slowly reaches over to grab his glasses from the bedside table. He doesn't bother leaving the bed.

Something feels heavy in his chest. Something under his skin is crawling. The wind outside does not sound gentle. It sounds like a thousand whispers. A thousand ghosts, all whispering together as they watch him.

Legundo closes his eyes and lies back. The silence filling the house is… odd. He's normally used to the quiet, but recently he's been

adjusting to a *lack* of it. Now, the quiet isn't even restful anymore. He waits for the flow of questions to start, the uneasy banter, and is greeted by silence.

Something is wrong. It runs a worn track in his mind. Something is wrong. Something is *wrong.*

It is quiet, and he is alone.

"Rex?" Legundo calls out into the quiet. "Are you there?"

He doesn't open his eyes.

There's no response to his question. The ghosts in the wind continue to whisper at him. And still, his instincts insist that *something is wrong* .

The feeling continues to itch at him, chipping away at his nerves until Legundo sits back up, opening his eyes to stare at the empty room.

"Rex," he says again. "Where are you?"

He moves to leave the bed, reaching for the sword resting against his table. His fingers close around empty air.

Right – he'd left it by the door, on the table, because there wasn't any point keeping it near his bed for self-defense if he was going to sleep immediately. No chance for mobs to spawn would mean no need for self-defense, and. And mobs wouldn't spawn if he went to sleep. Because nobody else is staying up through the night to spawn them.

Why isn't anyone spawning mobs?

Oh. Right.

Rex is dead.

There's a brief few moments where it's just the facts, no emotion. Rex is not here – Rex is dead. The world might be affected, or it might not matter at all. There was a voice, and now there's not. A stifling feeling, like everything else is in lockdown as the fact processes.

And then the grief hits, no longer impeded by the sheer survival instinct he's been running on since yesterday, and Legundo would prefer the cold numbness of the initial realization over the sudden flood of emotions washing over him.

Flood. That's a good word for how it feels. Legundo falls back onto the bed, legs giving out underneath him, his entire body suddenly weighed down. He doesn't know where to place his hands. He tried on the sheets, first, and then on his knees, and finally on his face, his own nails slowly digging into the skin around his eyes.

Logically, Legundo understands exactly what's happening to him. A voice in the corner of his head helpfully instructs him that his brain is receiving too many 'sad' signals that it doesn't know how to decipher all at once, sending him into a lockdown mode of sorts. It's the body's natural defense against grief; it can't shut the *grief* bit away without turning everything off.

His brain seems to have gotten halfway there, at least. His thoughts are disjointed and disconnected, but coldly clinical. *Rex is dead. Rex died yesterday. This is grief.*

Gods. They weren't even given the dignity of decent last words. An apology and an excuse. Legundo wants to laugh at that, that very *Rex* thought, that their last words weren't anything important. He does laugh. A single, broken choking sound. He hates himself for it, and then he hates Rex for dying, for not being there.

And then he hates himself again, for not telling Rex more. Logically, he knows, he *knows* it wouldn't have saved them, but it would've fixed something before they got into that situation. Maybe they could've been friends, instead of uncertain allies, instead of whatever mess Legundo had made. Maybe he could've convinced Rex to sleep, maybe –

Legundo forces his entire body forward. His legs still dont want to support him, and he tumbles to the ground, the side of his body taking the brunt of the damage.

But it works. Legundo spits out blood from where he's accidentally bitten his cheek and sighs. He's been alone before. Alone is what he's used to most of the time.

He pushes himself up off the ground and starts to move through the house slowly. Forces his mind to think about each movement he makes, each breath and twitch of the eye, anything to keep him from spiraling further into grief.

He needs to move on. He needs to at least do the basics, even if he has to do them while feeling like he's wading through soulsand.

Legundo reaches into the storage chest in the kitchen and pulls out a loaf of bread. He tears it in half, then into quarters, forcing himself to chew on the slightly too-hard crust. It's tasteless, and his jaw hurts by the second slice, and it reminds him far too much of the same bread he'd had yesterday, the bread he'd choked down as Rex yelled at him to heal up.

He forces himself to finish his breakfast. He knows himself well enough to anticipate his own self-blaming tendencies. He wants to say he could've done something just to have *something* to be mad at, but experience tells him otherwise. Rex was barely listening to him in the first place. Maybe it was panic, maybe they were just too stubborn in general – either way, there's no realistic way Legundo could've stopped Rex from throwing themself into danger like that.

Inevitable. That's the word.

"Inevitable," Legundo says out loud. He hates the dull way the sound falls on the empty room. He presses his tongue against the back of his teeth, hissing out a breath as he leans his head forward. "Inevitable."

He needs to do something. He needs to mark this point. Something solid to hold his grief, something tangible to show the time that he wasn't alone. He needs to do something about the horrible churning feeling within him, have somewhere to put the tragedy that's flooded all available space inside of him and is freezing him from the inside out.

He should make Rex a grave.

Legundo wants to laugh at the relief that immediately sinks into his body. It's quickly overtaken by grief again, but the idea still sits in Legundo's thoughts, the only comforting thing he can find to focus on. A grave nestled quietly in the back of Legundo's starter base, a memento for those who follow to find.

He likes the idea of that.

He thinks Rex would too. At the very least it'd probably get a laugh out of them.

Legundo grabs a block of cobblestone and throws it into the furnace. A deepslate grave might be easier, but the voice deserves something with a little more effort put into it.

He watches the edges soften down, reaching in with his pickaxe once

the stone is smooth on each side. The stone is hot, almost too much to touch, but Legundo bounces it back and forth between his hands as he makes his way to the dining table.

He doesn't have a stonecutter yet, but that's fine by him. He'd prefer to do this part with his hands, anyway.

Legundo flips his pick upside down, the head of the tool resting against the stone. He keeps one hand on the handle, but rests the other on the underside of the iron blade, careful not to cut himself on the edge. Slowly, making sure the first line is as straight as possible, he drags the pickaxe along the width of the stone, leaving a thin white scratch along the surface. He lifts the pickaxe and sets it against the line again, dragging it across the surface again.

It's been a long time since he last did this without a stonecutter – a stonecutter would provide better lines, a more steady and even cut, but some things are worth that extra effort and also not spending an extra iron ingot. He's a bit rusty – the first few lines come out a bit shaky – but eventually Legundo manages to fall into a familiar. Drag, and lift. Drag, and lift. He blows the gravel dust into the air, brushing it away with his fingers where it lands back into the divot he's making.

When it's about a few centimeters deep, Legundo rotates the block to another side and starts work on a shorter line perpendicular to the first. By the time he's done, his hands are aching by the time he's done and the sun is a little higher in the sky than he thought it'd be. He dusts away the stone dust and chunks of gravel and sets his handmade stone brick aside to go rummage through the storage chests.

He hasn't gotten around to finding ink yet, so charcoal will have to do – even if it's wasting fuel, trees are replantable. Legundo grabs a bucket of water from by the door and closes his hands around the burnt chunk of wood, crumbling it into the bucket. Tiny splinters of unburnt wood prick into his fingers as he starts mixing the charcoal into the water, and it quickly turns to a tar-like sludge in his hands. He lifts a handful of charcoal paste out of the bucket and carefully drags his fingers between the grooves he's carved out in the gravestone, smoothing the liquid charcoal into the edges and bumps of the rock.

He waits a few moments for the paste to dry. The charcoal flakes along the edges, but most of it holds in place. Legundo picks up the grave in his hands, tucking it under one arm and moving back to the

storage chests. It takes a little bit of rummaging to find a sign, and a little bit more finagling in order to get it to rest under his arm as well. He awkwardly nudges the door open with his elbow, balancing the charcoal bucket on his other arm.

The world is vanilla enough that there's not exactly any seasons to go by, but the warm air and gentle breeze feel like an archetypal spring day. The sun's edges occasionally vanish behind clouds, and the scattered trees around have rich green leaves. The path back to the garden is still littered with tiny fragments of bone. Legundo walks through the path without any effort to clear them, silently carrying his burden.

He doesn't want to place Rex in the center of their vague crop garden, but somewhere on the outskirts of the patch might be nice. There's a small splotch of green between the garden and the house, just enough space to work with. Legundo steps off the path and kneels down on the grass, setting his bucket aside as he carefully sets the grave in place. He makes sure it's aligned straight, set firmly in the dirt. The grass clings to the edge of the stone, and for a moment it feels possible to pretend this grave has been here since the beginning of the world.

Legundo stares down at the gravestone. There's nothing under it – he doesn't have anything to bury, because the voice didn't leave items or a corpse behind. Something about that almost strikes him as odd, but it's a sort of distant curiosity compared to the heavy feeling of not even having a trinket to bury. He sighs and sets the spruce sign on one side of the grave, standing up and staring at its blank surface.

What is he supposed to write, anyway?

Rex – the voice – never really said much about themself that was understandable, especially not in a postmortem sense. The "future tense" thing about their name was all but unintelligible, and Legundo is hesitant to make any character judgements about them while he's still being weighed down by loss. He might be too bitter to say anything nice, at this rate.

They were there for a bit, though. As much as it pains Legundo to admit it, he'd at least enjoyed having someone on his side for a little while. He does his best to choke back tears, wiping his eyes as he stares down at the sign.

"You could try *'a broadsword is still a dagger for giants'?"*

Legundo nearly kicks over the bucket of charcoal paste as he whips

around to see absolutely nothing, as is standard for that voice he's become so uncomfortably familiar with. But it *is* familiar – it's Rex. It's definitely Rex, and he's resisting the urge to start *swinging* right now. Sure, the voice has played with his emotions before, but this is a *new* kind of low blow past the level of intentionally being ominous. This cannot *possibly* count as a funny prank, no matter *how* tone-deaf Rex is.

"I thought–" no, "You let me think you were *dead!"*

Rex sighs quietly, a slow and contemplative breath in and out, like they're searching for the right words. "…I don't think I can remember anyone ever mourning me before. I thought it'd feel less, I dunno, *depressing?* But watching someone stare at a blank sign is just *sad."*

Something about Rex's tone deflates Legundo's anger just a little. He's still upset, but it's slightly more clear now that this is *not* new and malicious behavior – this is Rex doing the thing that they do and hiding parts of themself. It's at least better than what happened several nights ago, now that he knows it's not on purpose. He'll take being ghosted over watching someone brutally dismember phantoms any day. It does still raise some questions, though.

"How long were you… there?"

"I respawned here 'cause I remembered to tap the bed, thought about going back for you and then figured you'd be smart enough to not try to solo a raid in unenchanted iron, and then…" Rex trails off, unwilling to finish the rest of their sentence.

"You respawned," Legundo repeats.

"Legs," Rex says with that slight strain on their voice that tells Legundo he's pushing into uncomfortable territory for them, "Not *only* are you giving me a weird look, but it's not even pointed in my *direction.* Little to the left if you're gonna suspiciously glare at me? *Thanks."*

"You didn't…" It's his turn to trail off now. The feeling of the world *lurching* isn't exactly one Legundo can shake off easily, but it's also not something he's sure about telling Rex. Now that he knows they can respawn, he's not eager to tell them *most* things – they're in *far* less danger than he is when given that consideration.

"Didn't what, Gundo?"

“Just a normal respawn? Nothing weird about it? I mean, this *is* still a hardcore world.”

“Guess I don’t count as a player then,” Rex says with a snort. “One more tally on the *giant spider monster* side of the board.”

“Rex,” Legundo says. “Not in the mood.”

Rex hums thoughtfully, that little signature two-tone hum that Legundo had been missing not five minutes ago. *“Oh,* you’re like, *actually* upset.”

“Why wouldn’t I be?” Legundo resists the urge to grit his teeth, tries to restrain that bubbling feeling of anger in his chest away from the surface.

“I dunno,” Rex says. “I just didn’t think it’d matter that much to you, is all. Something to do with the *tragic backstory?”*

Legundo’s prepared for the voice drop at the end of the sentence this time. It’s a familiar pattern, *annoyingly* familiar, and he’s already full of too much emotion to feel fear right now. Even Rex putting their hand down on his shoulder and leaning forward doesn’t do much other than briefly startle him.

“No… you’re *mad* ‘cause you *can’t get rid of me,* aren’t you.”

Legundo raises his hand to where Rex is resting theirs on his shoulder. Whatever he’s feeling, he thinks distantly, it’s not fear and it’s not anger. There’s a grounding presence to that weight on his shoulder. Confirmation that Rex *isn’t* dead, and that – at least for the time being – he *isn’t* stuck in this situation alone. “I’m not mad,” he says. Nothing else.

“Yeah, you are,” Rex says, voice sharpening defensively. “You just don’t wanna say it to my face. Y’know, rage is a perfectly normal feeling to experience at a funeral.”

It’s probably not worth arguing this point, and on some level Legundo is aware of that. Even if he did want to push the issue, though, he couldn’t. Anything he could think to say, any sentence he could form, any semblance of speech is entirely drowned out by the feeling of Rex’s hand on his shoulder. It’s gone past grounding, at this point. It’s the only thing he can even remotely be aware of right now, that there is a hand under his own burning into his shoulder. He can feel a pulse picked up by those nerve endings and he’s not sure if it’s Rex’s or his

own.

“Oh, we’re doing the silent treatment now?” Rex’s tone becomes sharper, icier. Somewhere behind that is another emotion that Legundo can’t identify through the blood rushing in his ears. “It’s no fun when you don’t poke back, Legs.”

They start to slide their hand from his shoulder and – maybe it’s the feeling of movement, maybe it’s just pure panic, but Legundo instinctively clamps his hand down and pushes Rex’s hand back down, fingers closing over the top of their hand.

They make a small, choked noise in what is either surprise or pain. Legundo can’t tell which it is and he’s not sure if he cares at this point.

“Legs,” Rex says slowly, uncertainty clearer now. “You’re starting to freak me out here.”

They try to pull their hand away again, fingers curling away from his shoulder. All Legundo can think is *no, let me have this* without even understanding why, and still without thinking he wraps his hand around Rex’s wrist and pulls it back towards him.

“Ooookay!” Rex laughs nervously. “O- *kay!* This better not be the precursor to a murder attempt, buddy, because I *just* got done being dead?”

They try to tug their hand away yet again, and Legundo tugs back, tightening his grip. Any pulse under his fingertips is drowned out by his own, but he can still feel flesh beneath his fingertips, and it feels *real,* like something he can know is happening. Like something that will fade away the second he lets go.

“Legs,” Rex says, “let *go* of me. That *hurts.”*

Legundo grits his teeth and pulls them back, unable to form words in the haze of emotion he’s caught in, unsure what words would even work in this situation. Better to make a physical example, better to *show* them what he wants them to do–

“Legundo,” Rex half-whispers, “you’re *hurting* me,” and somewhere in there is an emotion Legundo can recognize, even through the mental fog. Panic, deep-seated and genuine panic, approaching fear but not quite breaching the surface of it.

He drops their wrist immediately, hand falling back down to his side.

He doesn't know why, just like he doesn't know why he started holding onto them in the first place. His shoulder feels like it's burning up where their hand was a few moments ago.

He kind of wishes he hadn't dropped their hand – for a moment he'd had Rex caught off-guard, for a moment he'd had something on them they hadn't expected. Now, though, they're going to wind up to ask him what that was about, and he's just going to get pestered about yet another thing he doesn't want to answer.

He can't even bring himself to apologize, as much as he probably should, because he doesn't *want* to. All he can do is stare at the tombstone in front of him where Rex presumably isn't, fingers twitching slightly like he's considering making another grab for them.

Rex is silent for a very long time. Legundo can tell they're still there from the distinct feeling of being stared at, but all they do is watch him for the longest time.

"Hey, Legs?" Rex says in a quiet tone he's never heard before and isn't sure how to interpret. They're closer again, might be standing in front of the gravestone after all. "I'm gonna touch your face for a sec, okay? You, uh. Have something on your cheek."

Legundo doesn't say anything. Not because he doesn't have anything to say, but because that list is overwhelmingly large and a part of him is already tightly braced for Rex to take a sharp turn into being creepy again. Braced in general for everything to come crashing down, if he's being honest with himself.

There's too much he wants to say, too much he's feeling. It rounds out into some approximation of numbness, and Legundo closes his eyes, a shaky breath leaving his chest without his permission.

Rex's touch isn't exactly *comforting.* It's not particularly gentle or soft, but it also doesn't *hurt.* There's no ominous backing, nothing to suggest they want to hurt Legundo, just a sort of hesitant caution – like they're pretty sure Legundo won't bite them, but not fully certain. Legundo's fingers twitch, but he forces himself to stay still as Rex's fingers reach up to the edge of his glasses and press against his skin, wiping away the charcoal Legundo had apparently managed to splash onto himself without realizing. They're quick about it, too, which Legundo appreciates. One swipe, a second lighter pass to get whatever they'd missed, and then readjusting his glasses where they'd been pushed slightly askew.

Half of him wants to start swinging with no regard for who or what he hits, half wants to make a grab for Rex's hand again, half of him wants to just *bolt* and put as much distance as he can between the two of him. That's three halves, but Legundo's not thinking in math at the moment, and the extra weight feels like a decent enough approximation of how he's feeling right now – *overburdened.*

"There ya go, Legs. Feel better?"

"Inevitable," Legundo says again, a muscle in his jaw twitching as he clenches his teeth.

Rex pauses. "That's, uh. Not really an *answer,* buddy? We might be able to make it one, but also, I *did* hear you the first time you said it."

His back teeth grind against each other as he glares down, staring at the grave and the sign and the dye. It's just a pointless marker now. Nothing important behind it.

His eyes start to burn.

"Y'know, I'm pretty used to being alone," Legundo manages to say. "You dying *felt* pretty inevitable."

There's a lot more he wants to say. A lot more he *doesn't* want to say. He settles for taking a breath and kneeling down in the grass, holding the blank sign between his hands and staring at the surface.

Rex doesn't say a word. Legundo bites his lip until he tastes blood.

"So. The deceased's choice of words are, and I quote," he says, "' *a broadsword is still a dagger for giants,'* which might be the stupidest epitaph ever conceived."

It's an opening. It's a bad one, but Legundo isn't in much of a place to do better than that. He knows Rex is looking at him. He can practically feel their stare boring into the back of his neck.

If Rex has anything to say, though – about the not-a-tombstone, about the remaining charcoal on his face, about the tears washing that off – they don't say a word. He knows better than to assume they haven't *noticed,* but they don't call any attention to it.

"I just think you don't appreciate the words of a genius," they respond with an exaggerated sort of smugness, and Legundo can hear them swagger around to his side. "I'm giving you all this wisdom for *free,*

Legs! The *least* you could do is pretend to care a *little* about what I'm telling you."

Legundo scoffs and dips his fingers into the bucket – considers flicking some of the gunk in Rex's direction, but decides against it. Instead, he presses his fingers to the surface of the sign to start with an *A* . Things feel a little more normal again as he tosses a grin in Rex's direction.

"Yeah, well, maybe if they were your last words."

Chapter End Notes

Solar's note: howdy, y'all! full disclosure -- fluffy and i only have one more chapter prewritten right now, and after that stuff's unfinished. we *have* a really solid plot for a good chunk of time, but what we *don't* have is the time itself. hopefully after i get this paper rewritten we'll be able to get some more out and there shouldn't be a blip in the update schedule, but there's a chance stuff might get funky.

anyway, i have a question for y'all! normally i don't do this type of thing because i don't like the idea of having people in the comments answer the question i ask and nothing else -- this isn't youtube, there is no algorithm that boosts works based on comment amount or w/e -- but i'm genuinely curious and i figure, hey, if you have an opinion on this you've probably got stuff to say about the chapter (even if it's just AAAAAAAAAAAAA up to character limit).

so, **what do you guys do with the chapter warnings?** i'm not going to stop doing them, as they're as much part of the process as writing itself is + it's actually pretty helpful for me personally, but i'm curious how other people view/use them -- do you ignore them or avoid them because of spoilers? do you check them to see if there's something you'll need to avoid? do you read them to actively try and figure out what's coming up in the chapter? do you read it and go "oh, neat" and then move on?

i dunno. i'm curious. when writing them, i try to make them as accurate as possible without actually spoiling anything -- there's definitely at least one key phrase by now that i think people have come to *expect* will mean a certain thing, but they're worded very ambiguously on purpose and it'll get used later for other things entirely. in a way, they're part of the story too, this little heads-up warning telling you what to expect but not how to expect it. a

little act of courtesy, y'know? i'd like to imagine they're from the same "person" who writes the chapter descriptions, even though that's not really a person.

anyway, this note got long as hell. i have a lot of thoughts on storytelling and even on chapter warnings and how they might affect storytelling, as it turns out! without further ado, though: be gay, do minecraft, leave kudos if you enjoyed and a comment if you want to yell (or scream, or cry, or curse my name, or hyperanalyze something, or answer my question).

oh yeah also fun fact, if you squint, the sign on that gravestone does *actually* say "a broadsword is still a dagger for giants."

Chapter 13: 016

Chapter Summary

Revelation, rebuttal, reaffirmation, revelation.

Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Intentional triggering of someone's paranoia and stalking-adjacent implications. Description of a violent fear response. Semi-detailed descriptions of death and moderate to severe injury in combat with a humanoid opponent. Light descriptions of panic attacks. Temporary major character death.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Legundo doesn't know if he'd like to remember his dreams.

Admittedly, "dreams" is a bit of a stretch – he either blacks out, or only ever remembers nightmares. Even calling them nightmares feels incorrect. They're flickers of vague images, half-formed thoughts and feelings, and a creeping sense that what he's seeing *should* be familiar to him, even when it isn't. They're consistently terrifying and inconsistent in every other sense.

Sometimes there are people. Sometimes there aren't people. Regardless, what remains is that mix of unremembered feelings that he can't quite grasp, panic or fear or melancholy or nostalgia gripping at his chest until he has to turn and *run*.

In the dream, he bolts. In the real world, he wakes up with a sudden jolt.

The echoes of the nightmare fade. Legundo is in his very real, very solid, non-terrifying bed. He breathes heavily, forcing himself to slow those breaths as his hands clench into fists so tightly that his fingernails dig into his palms. It takes him a full minute of staring at the ceiling before he can process that his eyes are open already.

He's still not sure if he wants to remember his dreams. He's *definitely* sure he's forgetting something *else*.

Legundo sighs, waiting for the tension to leave his body before he sits up in bed and glances out towards the rest of the cabin. As always, there's no obvious sign of Rex, and as usual, he can feel their eyes on him. He scans the room again, shuffling so that he can lean back against the pillow without slumping back down.

He changes position, sits up the rest of the way. He's closer to the bedside table. Close enough that he's able to *distinctly* note Rex's position by the sound of their breathing, whether he wants to or not.

"And the award for *world's weirdest creep* goes to *Rex,"* Legundo says, the words sticking slightly against his dry mouth. He does his best not to hunch his shoulders defensively. "Why are you watching me sleep?"

Rex giggles from where they're perched on the bedside table. "I wasn't doing it for *that* long."

"Not an answer, and not the comforting statement you think it is," Legundo mutters, and pointedly swings his legs out of bed the opposite direction from Rex. His boots hit the floor and he stretches upward, loosening the stiff muscles in his neck.

Rex hums their familiar two-tone note, and Legundo listens to them tap the surface of the table as he stretches out and moves to the kitchen. They seem fairly relaxed, which is one of their more difficult states to read. Legundo can hazard a guess, though – they want something, and they want to get him to lower his guard before they ask.

It's the kind of thought that Rex would probably call paranoid and Legundo would rather call *prepared*.

They don't have a lot to do right now. He's not sure what to build yet, especially since he's realized the secondary lodge is a build he keeps

making and doesn't really feel like repeating. There's enough diamonds and supplies in storage that he can't really justify doing a supply run, and while he can only stand going vegetarian for so long, they're not short on food otherwise.

Legundo flips open the lid of the kitchen chest and grabs the punnet of sweetberries from one side of the chest and a couple potatoes from the other. He sets the potatoes in the oven and takes a few berries out of the container to snack on while he waits.

Potatoes don't take that long to cook all the way through in a furnace. Legundo pulls his sleeve over his hand in an attempt to staunch a little bit of the heat and pulls them out, wincing as he drops them onto the wooden plates on the counter. He eyes the container of berries, picks out a few more, and sets the rest aside for Rex.

He briefly considers slicing the potatoes in half with his sword before deciding against it, instead grabbing his and splitting it partway in half with his hands. Steam curls into the air as Legundo reaches back into their makeshift pantry again, grabbing the bread he'd made the other day and breaking it in half.

It's not exactly going to be a flavorful meal, but it's still warm and will be plenty filling. Legundo carefully sets both plates on the table, then grabs the berry container from the counter.

"You must've slept well," Rex says from a seat directly next to Legundo. They've moved without him hearing again – Legundo flinches instinctively but manages to not drop the pulp container anywhere other than roughly in front of Rex.

"Consider the following," Legundo says, sliding into his seat, "What if I'm actually doing something nice without needing a reason for it? Believe it or not, that sort of thing can happen."

Rex snorts. Legundo waits for a response, watching as the berry box tilts to the side and empties slightly.

"Silent treatment, huh?" he says after several seconds. "Harsh."

"You're *hilarious,"* Rex says without an ounce of amusement. *"And* you're lucky I'm counting that as an apology."

Legundo shrugs at them, picking up one of the halves of his potato and biting directly into it. It is, as predicted, both still too hot and rather bland. He idly wishes there were at least a couple more

domestic mods in this world so he wouldn't have to jump through so many hoops to get salt.

"So," Rex says.

"So," Legundo mumbles through his mouthful of potato before swallowing it. "What weird and ominous thing are you going to say to me in order to ruin my lovely morning?"

Rex scoffs. *"C'mon,* Legs. I'm not *always* up to something."

Legundo shoots a skeptical glare in what he hopes is their general direction, listening to their fingers drum against the table's surface.

"My eyes are up here, Legs," Rex says, eyeroll audible. "But, no, I was just gonna let you know – I went and got obsidian if we wanna go to the Nether."

"The Nether?" Legundo repeats, putting his potato down. "Yeah, Rex? I'd say that's pretty ominous. Where'd you even get the time to go mining for obsidian?"

Rex lets out a soft huff. "Sometimes a guy gets tired of ripping mobs apart with his bare hands, what can I say?"

Legundo sits on that for a bit, raising an eyebrow at Rex and saying nothing.

"You *still* haven't proven I'm *actually* up to something," Rex adds, flicking a berry at him. "It's all just paranoia, dude."

Legundo briefly raises his hands in mock surrender, glancing down at his breakfast and hoping he'll get to finish it before his morning is *entirely* ruined. "Fine. The Nether. Am I headed there for a reason besides the dragon?"

"We could, uh," Rex's tapping pauses, leaving awkward silence. "… Okay, yeah, that's the reason I got obsidian. You've got me there."

Legundo tears a chunk of bread off the loaf, pointing it at Rex. "And if I don't wanna speedrun this world?"

"Speedrun as in doing it *fast* or doing it at *all?"* Rex says, "Last I checked, there's people out there that make a habit of killing the dragon in two or three days, tops."

Legundo shrugs. Chews and swallows. "Yeah. Maybe I don't wanna

kill the dragon at all."

There's another brief silence from Rex. Legundo takes the opportunity to eat more of his food, waiting for them to come up with a response. Their tapping resumes, slowing gradually to singular, unconnected beats.

"You don't wanna see me?" Rex asks. Their tone is more curious than offended.

Legundo shrugs again. His heartbeat feels heavy in his chest, and suddenly he doesn't exactly trust himself to respond right now. At least not with a reasonable answer.

The chair Rex is sitting in scoots out from the table, tipping slightly backwards before righting itself again. Legundo waits for the sound of footsteps, or the next string of words, or something to tell him where Rex is.

"I *mean,"* they mutter, and Legundo almost jumps out of his own chair when their voice comes from behind him. "I told you *exactly* what happens when you kill that dragon, Legs. Even exchange. The dragon goes, and…"

They trail off, waiting for him to finish the sentence. Legundo doesn't bother.

His heartbeat doesn't just feel heavy anymore. It feels tight, constricted; like someone's fist is in his chest, squeezing his heart until it can't pump blood anymore.

"You really don't wanna see me?" Rex says, and Legundo isn't sure what to think of the hint of amazement in their voice. "I mean, man, I'll *try* not to take offense, after all the bonding we've done, but Legs, *buddy."*

Two fingers tap on his shoulder.

"Might still be in your interest to kill that dragon."

"Is that a threat?" Legundo responds instinctively, barely even pausing to think the words over."

"Do you *want* it to be?" Rex says, without a second of hesitation. "D'you want an *excuse?"*

“I want to know what you are, before I do any sort of,” Legundo falters for a second as his thoughts begin going haywire. “Any kind of *ritual.* I don’t care if killing the dragon wasn’t a big deal before – it is *now.”*

Rex’s two fingers turn into three, a rolling pattern against Legundo’s shoulder. Their voice is softer and lower again. “Real *cautious* about this sorta thing, huh? *Almost* like you know something I *don’t.* So why don’t you tell me what’s *really* going on?”

“Why don’t *you* tell *me* what’s really going on?” Legundo counters.

“Because that wasn’t the *deal,* Legs.” Both of Rex’s hands come to rest on Legundo’s shoulders, pressure foreboding but not *quite* threatening. They pause just long enough for him to adjust to the extra weight before they shift, leaning closer. Legundo can feel cold breath to one side of his face as they snicker. “You wanted a *name* and I told you one. I don’t need to give *you* any more answers.”

“Besides!” They pull away again, cadence and register back to normal. *“You* still owe *me* that tragic backstory of yours, Legs! So I’m really not feeling like telling you much of anything until I get those answers, y’know?”

Legundo stands up fast enough to knock his chair backwards. He hears Rex make a displeased sound as the pressure of their fingers vanishes from his shoulder – and with that sensation gone, he *immediately* starts moving as his survival instinct kicks in, looking for a way out of the conversation. The house seems far too small right now. Going outside isn’t really an option either, because Rex will just *follow* him like they always do, and even being able to temporarily throw off the topic doesn’t feel like it’ll give him enough of a breather right now.

He makes it all about five steps before he’s stopped in place as Rex jabs their finger into his chest with enough force that he’s pretty sure it’ll leave a bruise.

“So,” Rex says, and Legundo can absolutely imagine the kind of horrible little smirk they have. “Nether?”

“Nope,” Legundo says, and smacks their hand away from him. He keeps heading towards the door – getting outside won’t be a *permanent* fix, but it’ll at least help with the claustrophobia. *“Absolutely* not, Rex. I may not know all of what’s going on, but when someone won’t tell you the details and still expects you to get the job done? That’s when *anyone* would know to walk the other direction.”

He makes it to the door, hand on the handle, half expecting Rex to try and stop him. The sun is far too bright in his eyes, but Legundo shuts the door and starts walking in a random direction, just somewhere that can be considered *away*.

Rex whistles softly as they follow him outside through the door. "Welp. That's that, then. Guess I just went out and knocked all those obsidian monoliths down for absolutely *nothing."*

Legundo whips around on the spot, sword drawn and shield at the ready, taking a combat stance without even thinking about it. *"Where,"* he snaps.

This is bad. This is so *incredibly* bad – they're here before even a quarter of his time in the world, and Rex has been *actively* messing with them from the sounds of it. They're going to be *furious,* and they've found him *far* too early for him to weather that fury, and–

Rex starts laughing loudly, bright and ringing and sharp. The edge to their tone isn't quite *malice,* but there's an unhinged quality to it that's just as bad, the distinct sound of someone who knows they sound insane and *don't care.*

"I knew it!"

Legundo takes a step back, bracing himself. The sound of their voice advances towards him. "I *knew* you were holding out on me, Legs! You *always* do! But see, here's the thing, I don't *forget* when people give me offhanded warnings to watch out for this or that, no, I *remember!"*

Legundo doesn't think. Legundo *moves,* lunging directly towards the voice with his sword out, and the blade *sticks* in front of him. His grasp on the sword loosens as they stumble backwards, and he watches as the hilt of the sword is yanked out of his hand, as the voice *keeps laughing* – wet and thick with blood, but still laughing.

"Oh!" they gasp before devolving into high-pitched, choked giggles. "Oh, it's *not* just a tragic *backstory,* is it? It's still *going!* It's *still* happening! You're still *stuck* in this story and you *hate* it, *huh?"*

Legundo's head is ringing slightly, half with the voice's laughter and half with a realization that he should've come to a *long* time ago. The voice has been *very* clear about not wanting him dead, about making sure he knows that they'd *make* him aware of it if they wanted him dead, but all that says about their intentions is that they're not going to *kill* him. There are plenty of ways to mean harm to someone – most

of them *far* worse than just murder – plenty of ways to use someone as a means to an end.

He should've known. He should've suspected from day one, considering how particular the voice has been about their requirements. They want him to kill the dragon – they want a body, they want *freedom.* And Legundo's probably not going to like whatever that *freedom* looks like, whatever else gets unleashed when they get that physical form they keep asking him for.

Legundo lunges for his sword, shield arm raised to deflect an attack he's almost certain is coming. No point in using another weapon just yet when yanking that blade out of their chest is *definitely* going to do plenty of damage on its own, especially since they're not wearing armor. He can see his weapon in the air, can pinpoint the rest of the voice's location by their wild laughter, and all he has to do is duck, raise his shield, reach out, and –

His hand closes around the hilt of his sword. The voice's hand closes around his wrist.

They yank him forwards with a sharp jerking movement, and Legundo feels his legs fall from under him as the lunge he'd taken abruptly becomes a stumble into the dirt instead.

The voice does that two-tone hum at him, low and dark. *"Careful* there, Legs. I'm not your enemy, *remember?* Trust me – *you don't want that."*

Legundo snarls and tries to wrench his arm away, with or without his sword, but he's stuck. Any real movement just causes him to fall further towards the voice, giving them more leverage and him less room to move. He's barely able to stay on his feet as-is.

His hand grasps at empty air as the voice yanks it away from his sword, grip tight enough that his wrist is twisted just slightly too much by the motion. It's not enough to break or even sprain it, but his anger gives way to white-hot pain for a fraction of a second. They hiss through their teeth like they're the one getting their arm twisted. *"Legs.* Take it *easy,* bud. We're both gonna get a *lot* further if you just *listen* to me for once."

Legundo has done enough listening. He knows enough. The voice may not have anything to do with Decem, but that doesn't mean they're safe to be around. They may be on his side, but they are *not* his friend, and right now they are the single most immediate danger in this entire

world.

He drops the shield in his free hand, sinks to his knees and ducks his head like he's giving up. The voice's grip immediately loosens. It's not enough for him to pull his wrist away, but it's enough that they're not going to be able to twist his wrist again before he can deal with them.

Legundo's offhand closes around his axe, grips the shoulder of the handle like it's less of an axe and more of a very blunt dagger, and jams the butt of the tool directly up into where the voice's chin should be. He feels it connect, feels their grip on his wrist fall away as they instinctively bring their hand up to their chin with a far more pained hiss.

His wrist stings slightly, but Legundo ignores it, flipping his axe around in both hands and swinging it up and around with as much strength as he can muster, driving it full-force directly into the voice's neck. It sticks. He shoves *harder*.

There's a wet, squelching sort of *thud* sound. Legundo lets go of his axe with one hand and stands, yanking his sword fully out of their chest as the invisible thing in front of him dissolves into particles.

The world lurches again. He's ready for it this time.

Legundo sheathes his sword, flicking it as though he can see blood on it to clean off, and straightens up, shoulders back, tossing his axe back into his main hand. He waits patiently, quietly, listening for the slightest movement.

The door to the house opens slowly, deliberately. Rex lets out a long, slow whistle from by the door, clearly signaling their position and giving him a wide berth.

"This how you treat *everyone* that tries to help you?" they say, voice forced-casual as though Legundo didn't just nearly decapitate them.

Legundo points the axe in their general direction, lips curled into a sneer. "There has *never* been anyone who was just here to *'help,'"* he says, "and you are *not* the exception. I'm not staying here for long, and I am *not* going to spend those limited days dealing with a snippy little *disembodied voice* that thinks they're the smartest thing around just because they know another version of me, *capiche?"*

He's not sure what he's expecting back. Probably some sort of argument or some attempt to save face, ideally maybe even an

apology. What he's *not* expecting is another short burst of that bright, awful laughter, the one where he can practically see the too-wide smile accompanying it.

"Oh, *capiche,"* Rex says, giggling, "oh, of course! Of *course* I get it, Legundo, I *get* it now! 'Cause your thing is, you *specifically,* you don't trust *anyone,* don't want anyone to know *anything* about you, won't even let *yourself* know, isn't that right?"

Legundo's hand tightens around the axe, white-knuckling it. He clenches his jaw, can feel every muscle tighten as he readies himself to spring again. He's not losing this fight a second time. "How do you know that?"

"How do I –" They have the *nerve* to sound confused. "Legs, it is *obvious* you don't trust people, I just took a *respawn* to –"

"How do you know I have amnesia, Rex?" Legundo practically snarls.

Their laughter abruptly ceases, a full stop like someone cutting a wire in an active redstone circuit. A sudden snap into complete silence.

"Oh."

"Oh?"

"That… wasn't what I meant." The awful lighthearted edge to their tone is completely absent all of a sudden. They almost sound *embarrassed.* "I meant, like, *metaphorically* you don't want to think about yourself, like not wanting to self-reflect, not – huh. That's… *huh.* Okay."

As much as he hates it, Legundo instantly knows they're telling the truth. There's an awkward start-stop to their words, an almost-visible fumbling. Even though they weren't standing particularly close to him in the first place, he can *tell* they've physically backpedaled. As much as an annoying jerk Rex is about everything else ever, they're being entirely honest about not knowing about his amnesia.

Legundo sighs heavily, running his free hand through his hair. The adrenaline still hasn't quite left his body, and he's still feeling the aftershock. His snap response is usually flight, not fight, but that doesn't change the jittery, restless feeling running through him. His free hand drops to his side, still shaking, and he clenches it in a fist to try and stop the movement.

He lowers the axe a little. Not a lot, but enough that the movement is clearly intentional – and, somewhat unfortunately, enough that Rex takes it as a cue to move closer to him.

"So, like, *no* memories? At *all?"* Rex says, and the way they say it almost sounds *hopeful,* like they're just barely holding back excitement. "So, hypothetically –"

"I'm *not* your Legundo," Legundo says, a lot sharper than he means to. Rex goes completely silent again. He sighs and puts his axe away, softening his voice as much as he can. "I'm not. We both know that much."

They clear their throat awkwardly. Legundo's not sure how he feels about their voice coming from further away again. "Right. Yeah. Course."

"What I *am* is *tired,"* Legundo says, "and quite frankly, I would like to have some time *alone. Actually* alone, not just you-looking-over-my-shoulder-silently alone. Just for an hour or at the very least."

Silence.

Legundo idly realizes his nails have dug far enough into his palm to draw blood.

"Please?" he tries.

"I… can do that," Rex says slowly. They don't sound hurt by the request, and they don't sound like they're curious about it or questioning it either. If anything, their voice is *distant,* like they've barely managed to parse what Legundo has said, much less managed to formulate a coherent response. "Yeah, yeah, that's – that's totally fine, just, uh – just don't get yourself killed or whatever – I have –"

They inhale sharply.

"I'm… I'll be busy for a little bit anyway," Rex says, and their tone has taken on a new quality, one just shy of frantic that he's never heard from them before. "Uh, take as much time as you need, be safe, if you need me just yell I guess, I am – I will *be right back."*

Legundo can feel the exact moment their eyes snap away from him, the exact moment they leave. No more eyes on him, no more vague certainty of another person's presence – he is, for the first time in two weeks, well and truly *alone.* He stares out into the landscape, and

slowly uncurls his fingers from their tightly clenched positions, wincing as he feels blood drip through them.

He is alone, but there's some other feeling replacing the space Rex normally takes up. A cloud of uncertainty, thick and noxious, that Legundo isn't sure he wants to explore.

Because Legundo is alone, and the person he'd considered the single biggest threat to him just a few minutes ago sounded like they were *panicking*.

Chapter End Notes

Solar's note: ...i'm sure that's nothing to be worried about!

anyway, this was the last chapter we had as backlog, but it's very likely i've posted this just before doing that paper presentation that's been taking up all of my brainspace with stress lately -- i got revisions done last week and made the slideshow this week, i'm all good to go! i'm writing this up the night before the thing, though. i want to get it out on time if i can, and if i set everything up right i should be able to just copy a couple links and hit "publish" while i'm still at that... look i'm just gonna call it a symposium. i'm a freshman and i'm presenting a paper at a symposium. it's not even for my planned major. i don't know how this happened.

where was i? right. updates. next updates may be a bit irregular/ later than usual! hopefully not, though. also i am *so* happy with how this chapter came out. please theorize rampantly in the comments and overanalyze the hell out of our wording. or just scream. either is super appreciated!

Chapter 14: 021

Chapter Summary

Echoes of the past, and of things yet to come.

Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Brief depiction and intentional triggering of touch aversion. Light stalking-adjacent implications.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“We need an ender chest.”

It's midday when Rex finally returns after several full days of no contact. Legundo can’t help but full-body flinch when he hears them, instinctively putting away his shovel and pulling out his new diamond sword in a single fluid motion.

“Do you have to do that?” Legundo says, brain catching up to the fact that the unknown threat is in fact the mostly-known non-immediate threat of Rex. “The least you could do is carry something so I see you coming.”

“We need,” Rex repeats tersely, “an ender chest. We don’t have to go to the End. I don’t care about that anymore. *We need an ender chest.”*

Legundo pauses from where he’s knee deep in snow, breath coming

out in puffs of white from the mountain air. There's nothing to show where Rex is. No breath, no footsteps. He doesn't put away his sword, but he *does* lower it slightly from the defensive position he'd taken.

"Can I ask why?"

He's expecting a short and bitter laugh. Maybe an exasperated and dramatic sigh. He's not expecting the silence, nor the fact that when Rex speaks, they're *much* closer to him than he would like.

"Legundo," Rex says. "Now is *not* the time for you to get paranoid at me."

"Wasn't paranoid till you said that," Legundo says, trying to slowly ease his way out of the snow. "If you're so sure we need an ender chest, I just want to know why – it's not like you're dropping items for me to pick up."

A thoughtful hum from by Legundo's shoulder – not directly over it, but nearby. "Yeah, that's kinda weird, huh? Not sure why that's happening, I really *shouldn't* be keeping my inventory after–"

They clear their throat. "–anyway, quit distracting me. En-der chest. Have something I need to put in it. Don't want it on-hand. Don't want it in a regular chest. Got it? *Great."*

"I absolutely do not *got it,"* he says, crossing his arms. "All that does is raise more questions."

Rex snorts. "Oh, yeah, like *you're* one to talk, mister beware-the-obsidian-pillars. You tell me what *that's* about, I'll *consider* telling you what I'm shoving in a box to not look at for a while. Otherwise? *You don't need to know."*

Rex's voice sounds… weird. Strained, with that odd frantic edge bleeding into it. Legundo doesn't like it one bit.

"I have amnesia," he ends up saying. "I feel like –"

"Don't try and *lie* to me," Rex snaps, tone suddenly frigid. "You suck at it, and I already know all your tells."

Legundo stills as a chunk of snow is kicked up to his right. Rex continues slowly kicking snow aside and indicating their movement until they're standing right in front of him.

They take a very audible breath in.

“Legundo,” they say, “if you want to know what I’m putting in an ender chest, I need to know what your stalkers are capable of.”

“Need and want –”

“Cut it,” Rex says, interrupting him again. “I’m not asking for a lot, Legs. No End, no dragon, no physical manifestation, you don’t have to give me my body back if you don’t trust me, *fine.* I am asking for an *ender chest,* and an ender chest *only.* Capiche?”

Legundo raises his sword by a fraction, ignoring Rex’s frustrated groan. “Why?”

Rex makes a sound, a sucked in breath between their teeth. “I have something, and I don’t want *anyone* getting their hands on it. That enough for you?”

No, Legundo wants to say. But there’s something about the frantic tone, the way Rex has given up on being spooky and has gone directly to – pleading? They’re not quite begging, but they *are* willingly telling Legundo the tiniest slice of a weakness they have. It jackhammers at the back of his brain, making him shift back and forth on his feet as he stares at the space Rex should be.

He’s well aware there are some things Decem should never get their hands on. It’s not beyond reason to believe that Rex has somehow gotten access to one of those things.

“Is it dangerous?” he eventually asks.

Rex giggles nervously, telling Legundo he’s asked the right question before they even respond. “Oh yeah. Without a doubt.”

Legundo considers pressing the issue, but something tells him he’ll get more information out of them if he agrees to this. “Fine. Ender chest *only.* And I’m keeping the rest of the blaze rods in there so you don’t get any funny ideas about opening up the stronghold portal.”

The snow moves around as Rex shuffles slightly closer to Legundo and then stops, almost like they were coming in for a hug before remembering what happened *last* time they got too close. Legundo resolutely ignores the weird mix of emotions that bubble up over that thought.

"Thank you, Legs," Rex says, sounding genuinely relieved. "Seriously, that means a lot, we don't want your stalkers to get–"

"You," he corrects them. *"You* don't want them to get it. *I* still don't know what 'it' *is."*

Another nervous giggle from Rex. "Oh, no no no. Trust me on this one even if it's the only thing you ever trust me on. *You* don't want them getting it *either."*

Legundo sighs heavily. "Sure. Fine. And I assume you're still not going to tell me anything about it. *"*

"Bold words coming from someone who made a deal with me for information and won't hold up his end of the bargain," Rex drawls. He's pretty sure they're going for that spooky voice of theirs, but what gnaws at Legundo is the ever-so-slight strained undertone. Whatever he's asking about, Rex really, *genuinely* does not want to talk about it.

Legundo leans his weight against his back foot, glancing at where he thinks Rex is. There's a pattern to their back and forths, now. They understand each other well enough to know what to say next, to do next, where to push and pull. What parts to chisel away at until something breaks.

"Do I need to say anything about your thinking face?" Rex says, ever-so-slightly too eager – jumping on that topic change again.

Legundo leans a little further forward, balancing his weight out as he rocks back and forth.

"Those obsidian pillars," he eventually says, and he can *feel* Rex immediately straighten up. "Stuff usually starts kinda messed up, but when those appear, that's…"

"When stuff gets *real* messed up?" Rex helpfully supplies, and Legundo shakes his head.

"More like a starting point. When stuff *starts* to get really messed up."

Rex hums their two-tone note. "Sounds rough."

Legundo makes a face at that, bringing one hand up to make a *cut it* gesture. "Don't – don't do that. Sympathy is *not* your forte."

They giggle, and Legundo tracks them as they take a few steps down

the mountain. “Or maybe I’m being *nice,* Legs. That *is* something I’m *capable* of.”

“Somehow, I doubt it,” Legundo says, trying to take the sting out of the words with a dry smile. It seems to work – Rex’s giggle isn’t particularly bitter-sounding. Its echo fades as they wander back down the mountain, leaving Legundo briefly alone.

He considers if he wants to stay up for a bit, shovel snow, act like nothing’s going on – but Rex has been gone for the better part of a week, and he’d rather keep an eye on them now that he knows they’re back. He sighs to himself, puts his sword away, and rests his shovel on his shoulders as he picks his way back down through the snow.

He’s about four or so blocks away from the door to their house when it opens outward for him. A block of obsidian waves in the air – apparently Rex has taken his offhand comment about holding something in their hand to heart for the time being.

“I take it that was harvested ethically and *not* from an obsidian pillar, like you tried to say it was yesterday?” he says, raising an eyebrow in their general direction.

They scoff. “We’re calling it *yesterday* now? Sure. No, I did actually go obsidian mining – *before* our argument, I’ll have you know.” Rex hums thoughtfully. “Though, I mean, if you do an unethical thing to a supernatural stalker, I feel like that kinda evens the scales?”

“It absolutely does not,” Legundo says flatly.

“Not even a *little?”*

Legundo just raises his eyebrow as he slides past them into the house, rolling his eyes at their snickering.

“Soo,” Rex says. “Nether?”

“Tomorrow,” Legundo responds, sitting down at the table. “We’ll need to get geared up properly first.”

Rex snorts, obsidian block tapping against the countertop. “What happened to Mister *I’ve-Done-It-With-Less,* Legs?”

“That guy got his– got *someone* killed in a freak raid incident and is no longer a reliable source of information.”

“I got better,” they fire back with a faux-annoyed huff. “But yeah, fine, I get taking it slow. You a gold helmet or a gold pants type of guy?”

“You’ve got both. And, considering it’s been *several* days, you’ve probably also got full diamond kit for both of us.”

An awkward pause.

“It’s not enchanted yet,” Rex finally responds.

“At this point, it’s basically your house as well,” Legundo says, leaning back in his chair. “Feel free to put that enchanting setup wherever you want.”

The obsidian block slides across the counter, spinning in circles until Rex stops it. “Yeah, well, not exactly like I went out book scavenging. It’s gonna be level one enchants for the time being, bud.”

Legundo shrugs. “Eh. I’ve done it with less.”

“Very funny.” The obsidian block tilts back and forth in a rough approximation of someone shaking their head slowly. “How *much* less, exactly?”

Legundo squints at the obsidian, doing his best to avoid looking up at Rex. “Stop that.”

“Legs,” Rex says, and the block slides across the table to rest directly in front of Legundo, entirely still. “A deal is a deal, y’know? You don’t have to tell me all of the details – I don’t expect you to, anyway – but I can still *ask.”*

“And I can still tell you to stop pushing your luck.”

“Only thing you’re doing is pushing *your* luck,” Rex says. They don’t quite snap at him, but the remark feels pointed, barbed. Something needling uncomfortably under Legundo’s skin. “I get it, Legs. You’ve been alone for a *while* and you’re not a people person. But that’s not really the case anymore, you know?”

Legundo does his very best to keep his breathing steady.

“And I *get it!”* Rex repeats with *far* too much enthusiasm. “I was alone for a *long* time, and then… and then I wasn’t, and it took me a while to get used to it, but it *helped* to have people that *saw* me. I got to

actually have friends."

The obsidian block tilts slightly, and Rex is within arm's reach of Legundo.

"So I don't know *exactly* what you're going through, mostly cause you won't tell me," Rex says, "but I do know a little bit of it, and I really am just trying to help. But you won't *let* me, you've been alone for *so long* you're afraid of feeling *anything* else."

"It's like you don't hear the word *amnesia* , *"* Legundo mutters.

"I *know* what *amnesia* is, *Legundo* ." Rex says, and Legundo gets the impression Rex wants to replace his name with something a *lot* less polite. "There's a difference between am- *nesia* and am-not-telling-you-anything."

"Very clever," Legundo says, trying to make his words as dry as possible. They're rapidly approaching another breaking point, and he can't help but feel annoyed that he keeps getting the short end of the stick in these conversations. "Y'know, it's generally impolite to keep a topic going after someone has said they don't want to talk about it."

Rex falls silent. Legundo grits his teeth and braces himself for another snippish comeback.

Instead, there's a touch on either side of his face and Legundo *freezes,* blood turning to ice as Rex's hands gently cradle his face, thumbs resting on his cheeks.

"You are *infuriating,"* Rex says, and that now-familiar tone colors their voice, that *anger* barely covered by a thin, strained cheerful mask. "And right now, Legundo, there is *nothing* more I want to do than to grab you by the shoulders and call you an idiot."

"That would've been preferred to this," Legundo manages to say, having to choke out the words. He's not sure if Rex's hands are too hot or too cold, but that *burning* feeling of skin-to-skin contact is back and worse than before.

"I *know,"* Rex says happily. "That's what you don't seem to *get,* Legs. If you were listening to me, instead of thinking how to avoid our conversations, you would *get* that I *know.* I *understand.* You're remarkably easy to read."

Legundo opens his mouth, and Rex applies *just* enough pressure to

close it.

“If your next words are *hate that,* Legundo, I swear–”

“–And if *you* don’t get your hands *off my face,* I *will* bite you.”

Rex’s hands are immediately off of Legundo’s face before he can even register that they’re gone, and there’s a scrambling sound across the table as they backpedal away. Their chair wobbles slightly as they sit down hastily.

Legundo blinks, feeling rushing back into his hands where he had been clenching them into fists. The burning sensation vanishes, leaving him feeling strangely cold as he tries to ground himself back in the present.

“Who bit you?” he says, uncurling his fingers one at a time.

“There are some threats you learn to take very seriously,” Rex says, and there is something in how they say it – the barest hint of loneliness – that makes Legundo’s gaze drop back to the obsidian resting on the table.

“I’m gonna go set up the enchanting stuff,” they say suddenly, and their hands smack on the table, presumably sweeping the block of obsidian into their inventory as it vanishes. “Get us geared up and ready to go for tomorrow, if you want to handle getting some extra cobble, maybe some food?”

Legundo swallows back the snarky response he wants to give Rex about them kicking him out of his own house, instead nodding and standing up from his chair.

“We should probably make sure we have some gold gear, too,” he offers. “Don’t want to waste too much of our time running from piglins, right?”

Rex makes a sort of hissing sound like their teeth are clenched. *“Yeah.* Probably not.”

Chapter End Notes

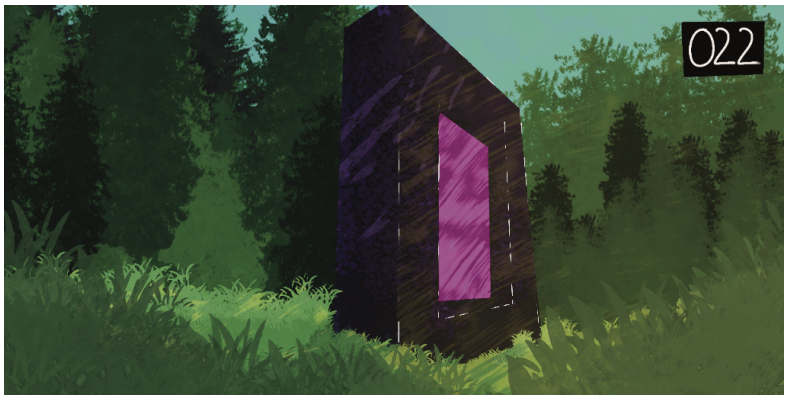
> Solar's note: it's midnight as i'm setting this chapter up and i just now noticed it's 4/20. Nice. anyway to answer the obvious question, nobody bit viking, but while he was intangible back in early dominion he saw pigundo poke fix one too many times and

get chomped for it

Chapter 15: 022

Chapter Summary

A hell for the lonely.



Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Extended description and portrayal of a panic attack. Stalking-adjacent implications. Severe physical violence towards a humanoid opponent and semi-detailed descriptions of death and zombification.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Over my dead body.”

“I’m not making you a gravestone,” Rex says, and places another block of obsidian. “You’re in hardcore, it’s good to save resources where you can.”

“It’s not about saving resources, it’s about doing the *right thing,”* Legundo says, and points to the empty corner of the portal. “This is not the right thing. This is an affront to everything I stand for.”

“The right thing costs us an entire *four blocks* of obsidian – that’s enough to make a full enchanting table.” Legundo’s pretty sure he can hear Rex shaking their head slowly in disappointment. “If you’re so torn up about it, we can put a building around it and build it into the

wall – then nobody will know the difference."

"There's nobody here but us, and *I'll* know it's not finished."

"Well," Rex says, and finishes the top beam. "Who has the obsidian, Legs?"

Legundo presses his hands together, pointing up at the floating sword. "You can ghost through the ground and go mine obsidian whenever you like. It's not like we're short on materials. Rex, it just *looks* better."

"'Hey Rex,'" Rex says in an impression of Legundo's voice that's good enough to be annoying but not good enough to be uncanny. "'Can you go build the Nether portal? I'll stand behind you the entire time and complain about how you do it, despite the fact that I'm supposed to be enchanting gear.'"

"I already enchanted everything," Legundo says, letting a bit of his exasperation bleed into his voice. "How'd you not manage to place fourteen blocks in that amount of time?"

"I didn't place *ten* blocks because I was looking for a nice place to put it, since you care about *aesthetics* so much."

Legundo glares at where Rex is climbing down the portal. "Right. Aesthetic. Because the middle of nowhere is aesthetic."

"It's barely fifty blocks from the house," Rex says, exasperated. "And we're probably going to build something big around it later anyway, so you don't have to look at the *travesty* I've created."

"Or," Legundo says, tossing the obsidian he'd taken from the storage chests up and down in one hand, "I could right this grievous wrong *immediately."*

"I hate you," Rex says. "I'm starting to think I *did* kick the bucket during that raid and I got sent back here because you're the most annoying thing my afterlife could possibly consist of."

Legundo carefully places an obsidian in each corner, sliding the blocks in to fit perfectly. The flecks of purple within the polished black interrupt his reflection, and he purposefully takes his time to finish the portal, stepping back with a satisfied smile.

"Oh my *god,"* Rex complains, and a shoulder bumps against

Legundo's. "Do you have any idea how long it's going to take for me to *fix* that?"

"Thirty-seven point six seconds, not including moving to reach the other blocks," Legundo says, and rests his hand on the hilt of his sword. "Funnily enough, that's *also* how long it'll take for me to kill you again."

"Lets maybe not explore that," Rex says, already a few blocks away from Legundo. "And don't blame me if you find an extra four blocks of obsidian in storage later, for that matter, because funnily enough they probably just decided to go home with zero extra input from yours truly."

Legundo shrugs at that, dropping his hand from his sword to his inventory, pulling out the flint and steel, idly scraping the two against each other. Not hard enough to produce sparks, enough to make the uncomfortable grinding sound of metal on stone. He repeats the motion a few times.

"Here's the part where you quip back, Legs," Rex says. "C'mon. You can't leave me hanging on a death threat."

Legundo allows himself a small smile. "My turn to keep you on your toes."

"Boo," Rex complains, and the flat of their sword drags across the frame of the portal. "You can't just go around stealing innocent voices' jobs, buddy. I worked hard for this position!"

Legundo lets that one sit, sliding the flint and steel back into his inventory and kneeling on the grass. He lays out all the enchanted gear he's made on the ground, placing them in two rows right next to each other. It won't change anything, but he does his best to wipe off as much dirt and smudging from around the runes etched into the armor as he can, watching the enchantments shimmer over the gems and metal as he cleans it one last time with the inside of his shirt.

"Alright," he eventually says, leaning back to sit on the ground. "Limited levels, so we've got what we've got on the armor. No rerolls."

Rex wanders over, their sword lowering to lay in the grass next to where they presumably sit across from Legundo. "From that alone, I'm wondering how many pieces got blast protection."

“Unfortunately, both pairs of leggings.” Legundo picks up both sets of cuisses, leaning forward to set one in front of them. “Enjoy your blast protection one.”

“Just what I’ve always wanted,” Rex says, and the armor lifts up into the air, twisting around. “You could just take these, y’know. Combine them, get a level two enchant, get saved from a stray ghast blast.”

“I could,” Legundo agrees. “But that’s only if you want to stay unarmored - which, hey, the illagers knew you were there once you started talking. Not entirely unfair to assume the piglins won’t also.”

“That’s piglins for you,” Rex sighs. “ *So* paranoid. But no, you keep the pants.”

Legundo shrugs and takes the offered armor, setting it on top of his own set. “Alright. If you die on me in there, I get to say ‘I told you so.”

“I’ll take the risk,” Rex says, and the armor pieces on their side each slide a little closer. “Really, it’s probably a much better idea if you just take all the armor. If something goes wrong I’ve got my own tricks.”

“Yeah,” Legundo responds. “You could always phase into the ground and die to lava instead of a piglin.”

“I’m more careful than *that,”* they respond with one of those audible eye-rolls of theirs. “Give me a *little* credit, will you? The illagers caught me off guard, that’s all. I won’t make that mistake again.”

“At least take the boots,” Legundo says, and slides the greaves back their way. “They’ve got fire protection, so you can throw them on in a pinch if you’re in a bad spot.”

The boots lift ever so slightly, and he raises an eyebrow as Rex places them directly in front of him.

“Okay,” he says, “did I make two sets of armor for nothing? I could’ve used those spare levels for the rerolls.”

“I’m just *saying,”* they reply, and Legundo can imagine them shrugging at him. “It took an entire three witches and the better part of a full raid to take me down. You hold onto the armor, and if I need it I *promise* I’ll let you know, mmkay?”

“When you get caught by a stray blaze shot, I will stand there and say *I told you so,”* Legundo says, and sets down an anvil on the grass

between them. “Since you’ve got the levels, mind combining those pants?”

The armor rises up into the air, hoisted by its leather straps, the strips of metal and gemstones clinking against each other before they clatter down heavily onto the anvil. Legundo hums for a moment, uneasiness weighing heavy in his mouth as he considers calling out… *whatever* this attitude is that Rex has adopted. Obstinate might not fully be the right word, but the end refusal feels the same. Something about it doesn’t sit quite right with him – it makes his skin crawl as he sets out the food he’s slid into the corner of his inventory.

“Alright, best way to split this,” he says, and starts sectioning the food out. “We go half on the golden carrots and apples, and then each take whatever leftover food we want?”

“I’ve got food,” Rex says. “Or, I will once we get in there. Free gold nuggets.”

Legundo jerks his head towards their storage room. “I mean, it’s gonna take a little while for that armor to combine. Pretty sure we have some left-over gold in storage you could be using.”

“Pff.” Rex snorts. “It takes a long time if you do it the *boring* way. Hey, watch this!”

Legundo is *not* successfully braced for the loud clattering noise that comes immediately after as Rex lifts one of the two legging sets and slams it down onto the other one so hard that the two seem to clip partially into each other before one of them completely vanishes.

“Easy every time.”

Legundo opens his mouth and then shuts it again, squinting at the anvil. People do tend to have different methods when it comes to combining enchantments, but as far as he’s aware the process should probably be a *little* more delicate than smashing two pieces of armor together full-force.

“So, in short,” he finally says, managing to avoid startling this time as Rex raises the boots onto the anvil and repeats their enchantment-combining process that *really* should not be working. “I’ve got us food, armor, and a fourteen block nether portal, and you don’t want any of it.”

“What can I say?” Rex says with just a *hint* too much snarkiness. “I

know what I'm about."

Legundo considers this for a few brief moments. There's an arguing point he could prod at, but as with everything that runs the risk of Rex getting spooky at him, and he doesn't really feel like fighting back an anxiety attack while trudging through the Nether with a disembodied voice. He shrugs instead, wrapping everything back up into his inventory and grabbing his newly combined leggings and boots with only a *little* bit of a grimace. His armor glints in the sunlight as he takes a couple extra minutes to make sure he's suited up properly.

"Checklist?" Rex asks, their sword back out and spinning circles in the air.

"Food, armor, weapons, tools," Legundo says, tapping each item as he names it. "Glasses. Common sense. Spooky voice."

"Can't go anywhere without that one," Rex says, their voice strangely flat.

Legundo doesn't respond, instead leaning forward with the flint and steel. It takes a few strikes – some of the sparks fizzle out before they hit the obsidian – but eventually a flame catches. The inner edge of the portal flares up in a bright purple light before dissipating evenly across the frame into a dimly glowing mist.

Legundo pulls his hand from the fog, watching the way it drifts to follow him. The mist curls around his fingers briefly, slowly dissolving in the breeze.

"No point in waiting, huh?" He says, pressing his palm against the flat of the portal as he hoists himself up, standing on just the edge of the frame.

"I'm right behind you," Rex offers. Oddly enough, it is somewhat comforting to hear.

Legundo takes a deep breath in and steps through the portal

(...)

and doesn't come out the other side.

Rex grits their teeth and tries again, turning on their heel and ducking through the portal from the other side, this time lingering in the exact center. The weird purple fog of the portal distorts around them as if repelled by their presence. It'd be kind of cool if it wasn't *really bad.*

They step back, one hand trailing through the portal, trying to ignore the tight feeling in the center of their chest.

"…Legs?"

No response. The portal frame is empty, and they are alone. The fog in the center snaps back into place as they draw their hand back, which would once more be *kind of* cool looking if it wasn't, again, *also* really bad.

They'd had a feeling this might happen. They had also been doing everything in their power to avoid thinking about that feeling – Rex had figured, hey, Legundo and the mobs can *kind of* hear them, and their presence is *physical,* why would a Nether portal need to *see* someone?

But, apparently, the world isn't willing to accept that particular loophole.

"Oh no." Rex shakes their head, trying to clear it. "Oh that's not good. That's *really* not good." They take a hesitant breath in. "Okay. Okay! That's fine, that's *fine.* So I can't follow him through. Tough luck."

They're pacing back and forth before they realize it. Old habits die hard. "I can't follow him through! So what? So *what,* right? It's not like he's gonna *die* in there. Probably not. Hopefully not." They let out a nervous giggle. "Because if he *does* die in there that is one hundred percent *my fault!* Because I just *had* to insist on getting an ender chest!"

They shake their head again, one hand clenched around the portal frame. "No. No, no, he's gonna *die* and it's gonna be *my fault* and I am gonna have *blood* on my hands and I do *not* remember how to do necromancy and how am I even going to *get* his spirit back if he's *stuck in the Nether?* This is bad. This is *bad,* this is *BAD–"*

They turn on their heel sharply towards the Nether portal. "Let me *IN!"* Rex snaps at it, as if that will help. "Let me *in,* you stupid hunk of obsidian! I'm supposed to be protecting him! What if his weird stalkers show up in there, huh? Did you think about that? What if he gets into trouble and I can't help because I'm stuck out here in the

freaking Overworld because of – stupid! Phantom! Mechanics!"

Their fist slams into the side of the obsidian frame before they realize what they're doing. They wince. "Ow. That might've – that's gonna bruise. *Ow.* Okay. Don't punch the Nether portal, Rex. Stupid idea, Rex. Speaking of stupid ideas, *Rex?* Seriously? I could have told him my name was *anything* and I went with *REX!?* I am– so *dumb!* That's a dog name! I bet he doesn't even *know* Latin and just thinks I'm a furry 'cause I told him I was a golden retriever! Not like it's going to *matter* though because he's gonna *die* in there on account of piglins being – being *big JERKS* – and it's going be totally on me!"

"Okay. No. *Breathe."* Rex takes a deep breath in and promptly dissolves into manic giggling. "Nope! Not happening! No normal breathing right now I am *having* a *panic attack!* Legundo's probably fine though actually. Yeah. You know what? Legundo is *fine* though, he does this all the time. He's probably so *fine* that he's already mining Netherite and he's gonna come back through *stacked.* Or maybe he's not even *going* to come back through! Maybe he's sick of me and he's just going to STAY in there, just kick it in the Nether to avoid me!"

Weirdly enough, it's that thought that calms them down ever-so-slightly. They take another deep breath in and manage to breathe out without feeling like they're going to implode any more than usual. "And you know what? He's fine being alone. He's, uh, he's been alone before. He can manage. *I* can manage, I've *also* been alone before. I could go do a project or something since I can actually use my freakin' *hands* this time around!"

"Maybe I take the corners off the portal since he can't stop me. No, actually maybe I break that *entire thing* apart, just smash it into little itty bits since it's gonna be *rude* to me! That'd teach it a lesson, *that'd* – that'd – that'd *probably* kill him. Knowing my luck that'll probably kill him somehow." They straighten up and pace back away from the portal again. Four steps back, turn, four steps forward, turn, four, turn, four, turn, oh they are going to go *mental* if they have to wait here much longer.

"Then again!" Rex says, giggling nervously. "I'm kind of *already* mental, huh? Not like this is *helping,* but I'm not exactly – I mean, how could it get *worse?* Maybe I just. Maybe if I just crack that sucker open just a *tiny bit* there's something in there that could help me, 'cause it's not like that could get any worse *what am I saying of COURSE it can get worse* am I *hearing* myself *talk* right now!?"

They change the direction they're pacing in by about 50 degrees instead, back and forth in a slight diagonal alongside the portal. "Oh yeah, REAL good idea Rex! That won't explode you permanently for no reason or anything! What am I *thinking?* I need him to come back with those blaze rods yesterday, man. It's getting to me. I'm not gonna do that. I won't do that. I'm not gonna *split myself in half* for some guy– some Gundo I haven't even known for a *month* yet. That's a bad idea. Not happening. Not happening. Oh but it is *tempting–"*

Rex shakes their head furiously, folding their hands behind their back, humming as loudly and obnoxiously as they possibly can. "Hm-hmm-HM-HM no it is *NOT* tempting! Nope! Not even a *little* tempting! Legundo! Can take care of himself! I've died TWICE! He's died ZERO! He's gonna be *fine,* and I mean, it's not even been a month yet, what are the *odds* of his weird freaky stalker whatevers showing up right now and *specifically* in a place where I can't help him?" They giggle nervously. "Probably a lot higher now that I've said that out loud! But probably not! Probably fine! Probably I don't even need to be worrying about this at *all* and I'm just making a mountain out of a molehill! They don't have molehills in this– in vanilla. I'd be making a mountain out of something else."

"Wonder what I should build. Making a mountain seems like a kinda stupid idea. I'm not really good at terraforming. Maybe I'll make something *inside* a mountain. Under a mountain! That could be fun, I could go build something in the city under the mountain."

They clap their hands together, hard enough their palms sting. "I could build a vault! Another one! Because the last one's been working *great,* and vaults are meant to keep things *safe* – ha, *safe* , cause it's a vault – and really, if I just need to keep him *alive* then that's the *ideal* solution, just shut him in a box where he *can't* get himself hurt! I mean, he's gonna be mad about it though, something something *'Rex, stop being so creepy, how am I supposed to trust you when you're trying to put me in a weird prison,'* well it's not like you trust me *ANYWAY,* huh? What do you have to say to THAT, imaginary Legundo?"

They hum, two notes, raising their pitch higher and higher as they stalk back and forth in front of the portal, up until their throat hurts and past that, their voice cracking.

"But I'll be nice! I'll ask when he gets back instead of just boxing him up like I probably should! Because that's a when, not an if! When not if, when not if," they say, and keep clapping their hands together, the heel of their palms going numb. "WHEN not IF, because you're *going*

to come back, Legundo, aren't you? You're just gonna come *strolling* through that portal without a *care in the freaking world,* like I'm not even here! Like you forgot *every-THING about* me!"

They giggle again. The mania's starting to set in properly now, the feeling in their chest getting tighter and tighter. "Because it's just– so– *easy* to forget all about me, huh? Because you can just *turn the ghost off,* can't you, Legs? ' *That was your Legundo, not me,'* like there's really any *difference* between you two. Guess what, Legs!" They swivel on their heels yet again, spreading their arms out towards the portal. "You *can* turn the ghost off, but Viking isn't *HERE ANYMORE."*

Rex laughs wildly, spinning in circles with their arms spread to the side, feeling the pull of the earth and inertia. They stumble slightly, and allow themself to tumble down into the grass, still laughing as they roll onto their back, staring up at the sky. "Viking isn't here anymore," they repeat, dragging the words out in a sing-song cadence. "Mhmm, Viking is *dead.* Doubt anyone mourned *that* guy! And hey, *Rex* got a funeral, so *they're* already doing *so* much better than Viking *ever* did! Who's *Viking,* huh? Don't know that guy, and it's not like anyone *else* knew *either."*

"What do you have to say about *that,* Legundo?" They mutter, dragging their hands down their face. They laugh, and the sound hitches and breaks slightly. "No, no, not *this* Legundo, *that* Legundo. What's that? *'Good riddance!'* Ouch, Legs. Way to kick a guy while he's down, you jerk. *'You deserve it,'* well, maybe *Viking* did. It's allll *Rex* now, *buddy.* And there's another you in the Nether, and I can't follow him, and wouldn't it be just– absolutely– so *hilarious* if this was your backstory? You two turn out to be the same guy, after all?"

Their hand drops back down to the grass, ripping up chunks of earth under their nails. "Doubt it's like that, though. Legundo is probably just in the Nether and knowing him, he spawned *riiight* in a fortress and he'll be *riiight* back any moment and we can go *riiight* back to our usual banter, oh Legundo, tell me your tragic ongoing backstory that's probably critical to making sure you don't beef it, *'Actually Rex, I've decided to be stubborn and unfair due to the fact that you worded something badly and personal experience I won't elaborate on.'* Yeah, I *thought* you'd say that, you stupid– *stupid*– freaking piglin. Oh wait! Wrong one! Not like it *matters,* since you're the *same person.* What's up with *that,* huh? Thought *I* was the only one with two of me. Well there's not two of me *yet.* There *will* be if I have to wait around much *longer."*

Rex falls backwards onto the ground with a soft *thud.* “I should be doing something other than sitting here having a breakdown. I should really, really get up and go do something. I lie down here like this and a pillager’s gonna come trip over me. Hey, what was up with that patrol anyway? Nine is – that’s too many pillagers, Legs. Put some back. Leave some for everyone else. It’s rude to hog all the pillagers. Although, I guess, since you *need* totems, fine, you *can* have nine pillagers. You can have whatever the hell you *want* actually if you just come back safe! Maybe I *won’t* put you in a vault! I could just steal your fully enchanted Prot 4 Netherite armor that you’re probably going to come back with since it’s taking you *so freakin’ LONG* to show back up and go make us both a raid farm and throw totems at you nonstop until like half of your inventory is just totems, totems, *totems!* Maybe *then* you’ll understand that I just *don’t want you to die on me!”*

“Of course, that’s a conversation for when you get back! We’ll handle *everything* when you get back, Legs, cause it’s when not if. When, not if. *When,* not *if.”* Their mouth twists around the words soundlessly a few times, exaggerating each motion of their face. “When, not if. Doesn’t sound like words anymore, does it? If you were here, I’d tell you that’s called *semantic satiation,* and you’d tell me to shut up and stop being ominous, and I’d go, *Legs, since when were fun facts considered ominous,* and *you’d* go *‘Since day three, when you proved you weren’t trustworthy by threatening me for some reason,’* and I’d say *wow, buddy, that’s an awful good memory you have there, aren't you supposed to have amnesia?”* They laugh, curling their legs up to their chest and rolling onto their side. “Or something like that! Not like I know what you’d say because you’re not here!”

They stare up at the portal from their position on the ground. “We’re friends, right?” They say, and curl their nails further into the dirt. “You mourned me. That means you care. That’s what friends do. And if you die in there, I’m gonna be *real* mad at you, buddy, because that means I’m gonna *have* to open that book, and if you don’t like having *one* Rex around, I *really* doubt you’re gonna like *two* of me.”

Rex drops their gaze, pressing their face further into the grass. “You’re taking *forever,”* they complain to the ground. “Like, that Viking guy? He thought he knew what eternity was, y’know, when he was *dead* , but this? Legs, buddy, you’re giving infinity new meaning. *‘Does that definition include you losing your mind?’* Oh, how perceptive of you, Gundo.”

There’s a weird, hushed sound. Not the sound of an enormous beast taking a deep breath in, but the sound the air makes as it’s displaced

by that creature. Rex jerks their head up, scrambling to their feet at the telltale sound of a Nether portal spitting something out. They know Legundo can't see them, but they spread their arms wide and grin anyway. "You," they say to the form starting to emerge from through the portal fog, "are *never* going *anywhere* else again without–"

The piglin standing there lets out a soft snort, tilting their head to the side.

"–me," Rex finishes quietly. They step to the side, out of the piglin's line of sight, raised hands lowering and slowly curling into balled-up fists. Out of *all* the mobs that could've wandered through. What a cosmic *joke.*

The piglin hops down from the portal frame and lands in the grass, scanning the landscape. There's a sword strapped to their side, but their hands are free as they take a few hesitant steps forward, dark eyes wide and reflecting the sun.

"Hey," Rex says. "Seen my friend in there? Blue jacket, wears glasses, might've handed you off some gold."

The piglin snorts again, a sort of idle sound that could be a dismissive noise or might've just been a sneeze.

"I said," Rex says, very softly. "Have you seen my friend?"

Not even a reactionary response this time. The piglin refuses to look away from the sun, relaxing and tilting their head back to stare.

"One more time," Rex whispers. "Have you. *Seen. My-"*

The piglin makes a pained sort of noise as a blister swells under their skin, necrosis striking their skin with a frenzy, and Rex just –

The partially-zombified piglin squeals as Viking pulls it to the ground, blisters erupting and flesh shriveling away, and Viking *snarls* as he slams its head against the portal frame, and by the time there's an open wound that *should* be bleeding, its skin has partially sloughed away enough to reveal part of its skull instead.

Viking screams, furious and wordless, and smashes the zombie's head into the obsidian again before throwing its body to the ground as hard as he can. Bone shards scatter through the grass, and Viking hurls himself on top of the fallen piglin, nails tearing away at the rotten skin and burst blisters. His fingers dig into the side of its neck, tendons

snapping as he pulls and *yanks,* and there's a sickening *crack* as bones and muscles snap under the strain.

The thing's head stares up at him. Its eyes, now filled with cataracts, glint with the reflection of the sun.

Viking stands, tossing the severed head to one side without really looking where he's throwing it. It rolls, making an uncomfortably wet sound as it does so, stopping against the base of the portal and dissolving into white smoke. He sighs heavily.

"Was a mercy kill anyways, bud," Viking says, looking down towards the gold sword lying on the grass. "You'd thank me if you actually knew how."

Chapter End Notes

> Solar's note: you guys wanted a Viking chapter, right? that's what you wanted? a chapter to find out more about Viking?
>
> anyway, you know it's a good chapter when i actually had to straight-up break out my friend leo's transcript of The Monologue for this one :D
>
> be gay do minecraft leave kudos if you enjoyed and a comment if you want to yell, please say words about bsch it fuels me greatly, i have no idea how we got this out on time but i'm super happy with it, early release today because viking's doing a new server thingy

Chapter 16: 025

Chapter Summary

Re-establishing the status quo.

Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Brief and inadvertent physical intimidation.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

(...)

back into the Overworld, boots slipping against the smooth glossy obsidian. Legundo hops down from the portal frame, feeling the mist cling to his body before dissipating in the sun, and looks around the –

Well, what *used* to be a grassy clearing. Legundo blinks and spins in a circle, craning his head back to look up at the building frames that reach at least a solid fifty blocks into the air. One wall is entirely filled, stones fitted nice and neat, with a huge chunk taken out near the top in what he can only assume is a window.

Legundo lowers his gaze, looking down the open air hall in front of him, and squints.

“Rex,” he calls into the empty space. “Did you put our house inside your new build?”

There’s no answer – no creepy noises or sudden scares, nothing to signify a rapidly approaching Rex. Legundo glances side to side, and lowers his hand to the hilt of his sword before moving forward and towards the house.

As far as his starter bases were concerned, Legundo had honestly thought of the house as one of his larger ones – after all, it’d been built for two people, and Rex had clearly added on some later extensions. That changes entirely in the shadow of the empty walls. The space between the frames is empty, but the way they dwarf the house makes the place seem downright tiny, like a scale model tucked away in a storage vault somewhere.

Legundo moves past the pitiful vegetable garden and around the house, towards the porch and front door. It’s… *technically* his house, but it feels right, in this moment, to raise his hand to knock against the door.

Which, he realizes a second after his knuckles have connected, has changed from oak to dark oak.

He feels eyes on him a fraction of a second after he opens the door, giving him the bare minimum warning he needs to steel himself before Rex does something creepy. Fingers curl through his chestplate straps, and – Legundo may have somewhat braced himself for *auditory* creepiness, but he’s entirely unable to catch himself in time as they yank him forward so hard he stumbles, nearly falling over entirely.

“Legundo!” the voice says. “Ender chest. *Now.”*

They’re directly in front of Legundo. Close enough that Legundo has leverage from where they have a hold on him, their grip just a little too tight and tense, far too easy for Legundo to break. He’s pretty sure it’s the type of mistake they wouldn’t make if they were actually trying to be physically threatening, and that’s just about the only thing keeping him from instinctively lashing out in return.

“Nothing else?” he says, trying to keep his tone light. Humor *usually* helps defuse things with Rex. “No *hi, how are you, how was the trip* or anything else?”

“Cute,” the voice says, and they yank on Legundo’s armor straps again, this time *up.* Legundo goes still as he’s dragged off balance, barely

able to stand on his tiptoes where the voice has him. “I didn’t stutter, *did I?* Ender chest. Or I’m finding a way to rip those blaze rods out of your inventory *myself.”*

“I don’t have any–” Legundo starts, and then immediately stops as the voice shoves several blocks of obsidian and an entire stack of ender pearls into his arms.

“Ender chest,” the voice repeats through what sounds like gritted teeth.

Legundo briefly considers snarking back, anything to defuse the situation. The voice still having such a tight grip on his armor isn’t really helping his nerves, and neither is the ragged way they’re breathing – strained like a rope pulled taut, almost to its breaking point and already fraying.

Legundo shrugs one shoulder as gently as he can, trying to keep all the materials in his arms from spilling. “You need to let go of me.”

“Ha!” The voice giggles. “Maybe so. I mean, that’d be the *logical* decision, right? Help you help me.”

“That’s – well, yeah.” Legundo says, and shrugs his shoulder again. “If you want an ender chest, I have to be able to reach the crafting table. That’s not really *logical,* that’s just. Point A, point B.”

The grip on his armor drops without warning, and Legundo stumbles as he lands, ankle twisting underneath him. He hisses in pain, glaring up at where the voice is still breathing heavily.

“Thanks,” he mutters through gritted teeth of his own. “Helpful as always.”

There’s a giggle. And then another. And another, until the voice is full-out cackling, reduced to fits where they stand. Legundo straightens himself up, doing his best to ignore the throbbing in his foot, and rebalances the stacks of ender pearls in his arms.

He turns to move towards the crafting bench, and the laughter cuts out abruptly, sudden and as jarring as a light bulb bursting. There’s another touch of hands on his shoulders, and Legundo can’t help the noise of pain he makes as the voice shoves him towards the bench, forcing him to stagger the few blocks it would’ve taken him to walk.

“Go on,” the voice says, cold in a way Legundo can feel, a chill spreading down his spine. “Don’t wanna keep your good ol’ *friend* Rex

waiting, *right?"*

"Right," Legundo responds, jaw still clenched tightly. He barely bites back the urge to snap at the voice – they're clearly not particularly stable at the moment, and doing anything other than making an ender chest is liable to worsen that instability further.

He fumbles the ingredients onto the crafting table hastily, crushing one of the blaze rods he'd brought back in one hand instead of grinding it down properly, shakily piecing together the obsidian he'd been handed into a grid shape and then sweeping the excess off the table as the ender chest comes together.

"Legs," the voice says, "I *really* don't wanna *rush* you, but if you could *kindly* set that up for me, that'd be *great,* you know, since it's in *your* inventory and not mine? *Thanks."*

Legundo half considers tossing the ender chest aside and storming off, then decides that's *also* probably a bad idea. He sets the container down on the ground in front of him and waits, closes his eyes to try and steady himself as he hears the container open and close.

The voice goes quiet for several seconds, long enough that Legundo almost thinks they've left the house and gone back outside to whatever the weird framework building is. When they speak again, their voice is different – still strained, but with far less bite to it.

"Sorry about that," Rex says sheepishly. "I, uh… you know how it is, the isolation gets to you. Can you pick that back up now?" Context tells Legundo they're probably gesturing at the ender chest and entirely forgetting that they're literally invisible.

"I don't have silk touch," Legundo says.

"Buddy, I just handed you a *full stack* of ender pearls, I don't think silk touch is gonna be much of an issue unless you're going to tell me you literally only found *one* blaze rod somehow."

Legundo presses his tongue against the back of his teeth as he pulls his pickaxe out of his inventory. One swift move – lift, swing, break – and his swing catches the chest in the hinges, knocking it apart into a pile of obsidian shards.

There's a brief moment where he considers swinging again – his ankle is still throbbing painfully, and part of him thinks putting a pickaxe through Rex's gut would make that pain just a *little* more manageable.

“That’s, uh, not your usual thinking face,” Rex says. “That’s significantly more violent than your usual thinking face.”

Legundo rolls his head from side to side, cracking his shoulders before putting his pickaxe back into his inventory as slowly and deliberately as he can manage. The way Rex tracks that movement is so obvious that he doesn’t even have to second-guess himself when he turns in their direction – he’s *very* sure he’s making eye contact with them.

“I’m *thinking,”* Legundo says, drawing out each syllable. “That there is something *seriously* wrong with you.”

“Oh, *yeah,* without a *doubt,”* Rex agrees, and there’s something like a smile in their voice that grates on Legundo’s raw nerves. “I mean, Legundo, *buddy,* that was a day one observation. That’s not really worth trying to kill me with a pickaxe, though? If you’re *that* mad and want a fun way to kill me, you could always try a shovel? That one’s a little less personal – y’know, a little more *just doing business* and a little less *I hate your guts.”*

“I don’t *hate* you,” Legundo snaps, “and I don’t know where you keep getting that idea from. You just –”

“I just,” Rex says with a slow, tense emphasis on every single word, “keep making it very easy to hate me?”

Legundo clenches his jaw, one hand coming up to pinch the bridge of his nose. “I’m not doing this with you right now, Rex.”

“‘Rex,’” they echo. *“Right,* because I told you my name was *Rex,* didn’t I. Okay. *Sure.”*

Legundo holds up both his hands, not quite sure if he means the gesture in more of a pacifying or a surrendering way. “Look, you’re just… something’s obviously up with you, okay?

“Again. We did *just* establish that’s a day one observation.”

“I mean, as of now, a new kind of weird,” Legundo says. “A weird that’s a lot more concerning to me than normal disembodied voice stuff. I don’t know if it was just the isolation, or if *that’s* the twist of this world, you can’t stray far from me, but whatever it is, it’s just – I’m just worried, is all.”

He can feel Rex perk up. “Worried? About *me?”*

“Don’t get ahead of yourself.” Legundo says, and drops his hands to his side. “Like I said before, Rex, I don’t want to do this with you right now. So either I’m putting a pickaxe in your lungs, or we’re moving on.”

“Death threats,” Rex says weakly. “Yippee.”

Legundo doesn’t bother with a response to that, instead crossing the room and rapping his knuckles against the glass. “So all that? That’s all new. You wanna tell me about that?”

There’s a shuddering breath from Rex, and Legundo freezes at the solid *thud thud thud* of footsteps against the floor as they rush towards him.

He’s always expecting Rex to be at least a little creepy, at this point. He’s honestly not really sure where he’d categorize this particular action in terms of *creepy* or *not creepy*.

Rex’s arms are wrapped tight around Legundo’s chest and shoulders, fingers digging into his shoulder blades as they pull him in tighter. It’s very obvious how much taller than him they are, the pressure of a body, a *real, actual person* bearing down on him, one leaning into the space between his shoulder and head.

Legundo’s not quite sure what’s happening or how he should feel about it. What he is fairly sure about is that his brain has either stopped working or full-on left his skull, leaving an incessant buzzing sound behind as Rex leans further into the hug, holding Legundo as tight as they can. Some very small part of him feeds him the information on what he should physically do in this situation, more instinct than any conscious thought, and he does it without thinking.

Legundo raises his arms to rest against Rex’s back, giving them a gentle squeeze. Rex, apparently, takes that as a full go-ahead, and he can feel his ribs crack as they drag him closer, fingers digging into his shirt jacket just a little too tightly.

For what feels like hours, Rex doesn’t say anything. Nothing to unbalance Legundo’s senses, or send chills down his spine – just pure, unbroken silence. Legundo awkwardly shuffles his shoulders, trying to find a comfortable spot within the hug while keeping his hands on Rex’s back.

Their hands twitch, and Rex moves, dropping one arm and dragging the other up to pull Legundo so he’s standing sideways next to them.

They're still leaning on him with quite a bit of their body weight, arm draped across his shoulders, and Legundo grimaces slightly as a hand comes down to ruffle his hair.

"It's, uh – it's a cathedral!" they say, and Legundo goes still as he hears them sniffle before clearing their throat. "You took *so* long to get back, Legs, so I figured, hey, might as well start on a little project while I'm *bored.* Didn't expect it to end up this big, but *hey,* you took your *sweet time* getting back, a ghost's gotta do what a ghost's gotta do!"

Legundo peers out the window. "Judging by your progress, I was gone for… a month? Two?"

"Ha," Rex says, in a dry enough way that Legundo knows they're trying to avoid saying something. "Yeah, no. You leave me alone for a *month* and you get a *very* different type of building, Legs."

"Let me guess," Legundo says, sighing, "I don't want to know?"

"You don't wanna know," Rex responds in that close, low tone of theirs before letting out an entirely too loud giggle. The laugh itself has become familiar to Legundo by now – half manic, half panicked – but it still makes the hairs on the back of his neck stand up.

Rex ruffles his hair again, which absolutely does not help with the situation in any way whatsoever. "But *nah,* don't even *worry* about it, it's only been a couple days. Just don't do that again. Don't want you dying on me somewhere I can't go get your corpse from."

Legundo is torn between *hate that* and *fine by me,* ending up somewhere in the middle with a shrug as he pushes Rex's hand off his head. "It's not a great Nether spawn anyway. Basalt delta *again.* Though I think I probably brought back enough to build with, if you happen to want any of that for your stupidly huge cathedral."

There's a pat against his cheek. *"Our* stupidly huge cathedral," Rex says sweetly, and giggles again. "I'm not making a whole entire interior on my *own,* bud."

"Great," Legundo says, "there goes that *separate* megabase I had planned."

"Didja *really,* though?" Rex says, and there's a soft *thump* against the glass as they lean against the window, smudging it without blocking any of the light. "'Cause it *kiiinda* seems to *me* like the only thing

you've got going is that log cabin frame up on the mountain that you keep having to shovel out. I'm just saying, at least you'll have *help* if you make this thing with me."

"You're terrible," Legundo says. "Just, like, the *worst."*

"Sh," Rex says, and Legundo slaps their hand away as they come in to ruffle his hair again. "Sh *sh sh,* Legundo. We're having a *moment.* We're being *friends."*

And as much as he wants to disagree, Legundo can't bring himself to argue with that.

Chapter End Notes

Solar's note: very tired while writing this so i'll make this brief. fluffy and i have been working ULTRA hard on bsch -- we are in all technicality doing week-of updates in order to get this out on time, but i am starting to like... *kinda* consider hiatus-ing prior to something coming up, since that something spans across multiple chapters and i want to be able to edit it in bulk without having anything specific locked in? then again, we might end up *writing* the thing in bulk, so, i dunno.

to be honest, i actually don't remember what i usually put in these. i woke up to my phone alarm playing a default tone instead of the actual tone because my phone restarted overnight and boy howdy, was that *something.* felt like the digital equivalent of someone moving all my furniture an inch and a half to the left. i hope you enjoyed today's chapter! it's a doozy, but then again I say that about a *lot* of chapters, don't i? this fic is M-rated for themes like this for a reason (although to be brutally honest, the worst is very much yet to come, and soon no less).

uhhhh, what else. honestly, besides this fic, my mind's been on other cubitos lately (and if you follow me on tumblr you know exactly who), so i'm not really gonna go off about that in the comments here. might be fic coming down the line if i can properly nail down some characterization, *definitely* gonna be some metaposting because i have an entire essay in the works. the comp lit major instinct does NOT go away over the summer. oh, also i rewatched some dominion stuff and remembered how much i love pigundo for being a total Sneak, and i really need to write that guy as a proper villain someday.

anyway, be gay do minecraft leave kudos if you enjoyed and a

comment if you want to yell, or talk, or say words indirectly/ directly at my face, or point out something cool about the chapter. if you have a friend that read *datd* and said they'd have loved it even if they weren't in the fandom, now's the time to shake them and get them into *bsch* because we're coming up on stuff that makes the "everyone holds their breath" chapter look like small bananas :D

Chapter 17: 026

Chapter Summary

A silent respite provides clarity of intention.

Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

No warnings apply.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I’m starting to think you’ve never built a megabase before,” Rex chirps.

Legundo hauls himself further up the wall, wincing as his palms scrape on the rough stones. “I’ve built *plenty* of megabases, actually. Normally they involve more planning and aren’t, you know, the result of some spur-of-the-moment breakdown decision.”

Rex giggles, and Legundo feels their hands grab the sides of his jacket and tug him upwards. “It was a *three day long* breakdown decision, thank you. I *do* have standards.”

“I’m starting to think those standards include making my life as hard as possible,” he grumbles, finally finding a foothold as they help him up. “Why else would you demand we have two of the walls done by *tonight?*”

“I mean, I’ve already done most of the stone mining for you,” they respond, and Legundo glares in their general direction as they pile even more stone brick into his arms. “You could at *least* be grateful for *that.”*

Legundo considers a retort of his own, and then decides against it. Even though some of the unease from yesterday still lingers in his gut, Rex’s attitude has decidedly taken a turn for the cheerful. They’ve still made the occasional ominous joke or slightly unhinged giggle, but other than that they’ve been normal. His paranoia is telling him they’re being *too* normal, but Legundo sets that aside, mentally stores it in the ender chest tucked safely into his inventory. Whatever’s in there can’t harm either of them now, even if it might’ve been influencing Rex’s behavior beforehand.

“Earth to Legs,” Rex calls down. They’ve moved to build a little above him; Legundo can see extra basalt detailing slowly appear along the walls as they start adding texture. “I *did* ask you something.”

“Huh?” Legundo says, and starts placing down blocks as well. “I mean. Thanks? For gathering the blocks, I guess.”

Rex mutters something under their breath and start to chip away at a clearly misplaced piece of basalt – they spin their pickaxe in the air with a little flourish as Legundo watches them, then go back to removing the block.

“You didn’t even have your thinking face on!” they say, grabbing the fallen block and placing it into the correct slot. “That’s impressive – is that your *way too lost in thought* face or have you been practicing how to not be so dang obvious?”

“Hate that,” Legundo says on instinct, and then squints up at them. “No, I just – it’s easy to get distracted. Are you seriously telling me that y– that the other Legundo *doesn’t* get distracted?”

Rex snickers, and Legundo gets the sense they’re hanging down from their spot above him, pickaxe twirling in hand. “I mean, I’ve *tried,* but he is *waaaay* too set in his ways. Hey – don’t try and distract *me* as well. That’s just rude! I was asking you a question!”

Legundo throws his hands out to the sides in mock surrender. “I’m not stopping you. Ask away.”

There’s a strange scrabbling sound, and Legundo watches the pickaxe reverse in midair, rising back up to the platform. Rex’s voice comes

out slightly squashed and closer to him, kind of like they're laying on their stomach to reach one of the lower blocks. "Hm. *Hm."*

"That's not a question."

"I'm *thinking,"* Rex complains. "Unless you wanna hear every thought that goes through my head, you can *shush."*

Legundo raises an eyebrow and places down a few stone blocks beneath him, building a small pillar up so he's level with Rex and can look down at where they've chosen to lie. "You mean I *don't* already hear every thought you have?"

"Wh– *hey!"* Rex sputters, and the butt of their pickaxe jabs at Legundo's ankle with enough emphasis to sting and little else. "I don't monologue *that* much! And really, buddy, if you heard *every* thought in my head you would – well, even *I* don't know what you'd do. Hm. Probably kill me again? And then again for good measure. And then probably set me on fire! Though that one *might* be a *liiiittle* bit overkill."

"Is this your way of making me trust you?" Legundo says, and kicks the pickaxe away when Rex jabs it at him again. They snicker, and Legundo steps down on the flat of the pickaxe head, kicking the handle upwards and into his grip. "You are somehow even worse than *I* am at this whole 'people' thing."

"Aw, Gundo," Rex coos, "that's not true at all! Look at us! We refuse to tell each other anything about ourselves, I've faked my own death by accident, and you've already killed me in cold-ish blood. If that's not being best friends, I don't know *what* is."

Legundo twists Rex's pickaxe in his hand, idly looking over the runes carved into both the handle and the inset gemstones before lowering his hand to hold it over Rex, hopefully somewhere within their reaching distance. "Someone's weirdly obsessed with death today."

"Call it a morbid curiosity," Rex snickers, taking the pickaxe back. "Though, *thank you,* that *is* my question. Which is, let me get this straight – you've *never* died? Like ever? Ever *ever* ever?"

Legundo shrugs, turning on his heel and away from Rex, slotting more stone bricks into the wall. "We've gone over this. Close calls –"

"With an owl, right, yeah," Rex says, and Legundo gets the sense they're rolling their eyes at him. "But that can't be *it.* There's no way

you've *never* died. Especially if I'm gathering this correctly and you've been on the run for a *while,* there *has* to have been more than just a few close calls."

Legundo allows himself a little grin, continuing to build as he looks back over at them, raising his voice in pitch to match theirs. "Nah. I'm just *that* good."

Rex does that little two-tone hum of theirs. "No, no, because *something* is *not* adding up here. Nobody's *that* good, Legs, *especially* not when they're on the run and apparently in modded a lot of the time. Seriously, what *gives?"*

He scrunches up his face in thought. "…You're being serious," he finally says. "How is me not dying so hard for you to believe? I'm still *here,* aren't I?"

"Legundo, can you crouch down so I can grab your face again?"

"Absolutely not," Legundo says, and then braces instinctively as they remain silent for a second more. When their forearm comes to rest against his shoulder, he takes a bit of solace in the fact that he's managed to actually predict them being creepy.

"Nobody," Rex repeats in that low tone that still makes Legundo flinch instinctively, "is *that good.* So either you're lying to save face or there's something *really bad* that you are just, for *some* reason, *despite* the fact that we have a *deal* going, *not telling me about."*

Legundo briefly mourns the loss of a peaceful day, and then forces out a laugh, shrugging Rex off of him. "Just because you don't believe me doesn't mean I'm breaking our deal. Or that I'm lying. Just means I'm telling you what you asked."

There's a sudden pressure on his wrist. Legundo grimaces as Rex's fingers curl around his hand, their nails digging ever so slightly into his skin.

"I am," Rex says, "getting *very* tired of you dancing around our deal, Legundo."

"Our *deal?"* Legundo says, and *yanks* his own wrist downwards, breaking Rex's grip and twisting himself to have a grip on their wrist instead. "Okay, *Rex.* Let's go over our deal, *Rex.* Our deal was *a* name for *part* of the story. You didn't have to tell me everything, and I didn't have to tell you everything – I said we could keep lying to each

other. So, *Rex,* unless you want to give me a different, *real* name, you're gonna have to start believing me when I say I'm telling the truth."

Rex clicks their tongue dismissively, and Legundo becomes very aware of the fact that he is on top of a very tall wall with no rails. Anger isn't worth a near-death experience – he forces himself to let go of their wrist, one finger at a time, wanting nothing more than to just shove *them* off.

"You're just going to have to trust me," he manages to say through gritted teeth. "Think you're capable of that, Rex?"

There is no immediate answer from Rex. There's a haunting silence, an absence of a person that just goes beyond being invisible, like Rex has vanished and another thing, not even a person, is standing in front of him. The wind kicks up a notch, and Legundo steadies himself on the platform, staring straight ahead.

A diamond pickaxe comes into view, spinning slowly as the voice twirls it in the air. The gem inlays and enchantments on it gleam in the sunlight as the voice slowly, deliberately taps him on the chest with the point of the pickaxe – too slow to be a threat, not fast enough to be anything else either.

"Trust you," the voice says, hollow and empty. "That's the thing, Legundo, I *do* trust you. I just also *know* you, and you keep doing this – no, you *always* do this. You just don't get that you're not the person who decides when you've filled out your end of the bargain, and you don't get to call things even just because *you say so.* You don't get to call quits on me, Legs. Fool me once, shame on me, but I'm not doing *this* song and dance again."

Legundo's pretty sure his lungs stopped working a few minutes ago. His heart, traitor it is, thuds furiously as the voice's exact words repeat in his head – less a threat and more quiet frustration. They're weirdly detached-sounding, like he could hear them saying *I'm not mad, just disappointed* any second now. There's no shock.

There's no shock, because this is not the first time the voice has had this conversation.

He takes a shaky breath in, trying to not pay attention to the pickaxe point still tapping lightly against his chest. "That's not –" Legundo says, and presses his tongue against the back of his teeth. He doesn't want to be accusatory, just open – just needs to lay out what the voice

has all but told him by now. “This isn’t just about me, is it? It’s about him, too.”

“I’m not telling you *anything else* until –”

“Until you get answers out of me, yeah,” Legundo says, and raises his hand, using the flat of his knuckles to push the pickaxe blade to the side. “I know. I get it. But don’t you think you’re being a *little* obvious?”

He can practically hear Rex scrunching their face up in confusion as they lower the pickaxe away from his chest. “What do you mean, *obvious?”*

“I, quote unquote, *‘always* do this,’” Legundo says, making quotation marks with his fingers. “Meaning that I’ve done this to you before?”

“You pull this *all the time,* buddy,” Rex huffs. “That’s not being obvious, just *stating* the obvious.”

“Except this is the only time we’ve made a bargain like this. So if *I* always do this, then this has to be about your version of Legundo as well.” He sits down on the stone wall, eyeing the floating pickaxe for any sudden movements. “And you keep saying we’re pretty similar, so I’m going to take a shot in the dark and say he got stuck in a deal he didn’t want with you and is doing everything he can to get out of it.”

The pickaxe moves slowly again, resting on a bit of stone brick nearby. “Let’s say I believe you,” Rex says, voice slightly shaky. “Let’s say your buckwild guess is correct. What’s it matter? You’re still cheating me.”

Legundo holds up a hand. *“He* might be. But, as we have established, your Legundo is *not* the same person as me, and *I* am holding to the terms of our bargain. You just keep fishing for a *specific* piece of information I can’t afford to give you. I’ve been honest otherwise, haven’t I?”

Rex makes a low hissing sound. The pickaxe lowers to point at Legundo again, but doesn’t move any closer than that. “You and your loopholes.”

“I’m not even gonna –” Legundo shakes his head. “Again. *Rex.* You’re trying to make me pay for something I didn’t *do.”*

“Legundo,” Rex replies, just sharply enough that their voice ever-so-

slightly cracks. “I’m not asking *you* to pay for what *he* did. Or didn’t. If anyone’s paying for his cold feet, it’s *me* getting screwed over.”

Legundo eyes the pickaxe a moment longer, and then looks up into the empty space where he’s almost certain Rex’s face is. “So what?”

“So what?”

Legundo keeps his gaze and voice steady, keeps the bite of anger out of what he wants to say for something much more tempered and reasonable. “Yeah. So what? You’re gonna explode on me again because I reminded you I’m not your Legundo, and we’ll go back to the same *song and dance* again? *Great* plan, Rex. This time it’ll *definitely* play out differently for some reason.”

He can feel the weight of Rex’s glare lessen, slide off of him and away as they shift and move, the pickaxe pulling upwards and onto their level of the wall. Legundo tracks the movement, feels Rex's attention shift from him and out over the cathedral.

“…you’re so *annoying,”* Rex mutters, voice muffled. “I don’t know why we’re friends.”

Legundo stretches out his arms, legs dangling over the edge of the cathedral wall as he sweeps a few extra stone bricks back into his inventory. “That was your decision, not mine.”

There’s a strangled laugh and shuddering breath, and Rex’s voice goes from muffled to almost entirely unintelligible.

“I just… I want to *help,* Legs.”

Legundo opens his mouth, snarky response on the tip of his tongue, but it fades as the pickaxe drags across the stone, leaving thin white scratches behind as Rex pulls it back into their inventory.

“I just wanna help,” they repeat, “and we keep talking about *trust,* and I – I *promise* that’s all I want to do. And it just keeps going *wrong.* And I don’t know *why.* I’ve met you twice now, and neither time you’ve trusted me, and I’m starting to think that it’s just something about *me* that I *can’t* change, because – because I don’t know what I’m doing wrong.”

Legundo keeps his gaze forward. “I mean, I *did* tell you that, the first couple of days.”

“Oh, shut *up,”* Rex says, and Legundo winces at the raw edge to their words. “Way to kick a guy while he’s down, you *jerk.”*

It’s not dangerous. Not yet, not like how it was before. There’s an opening in Rex’s words, like they’re waiting for him to respond, and Legundo leans back against the rough stone wall with a shrug and a glance in Rex’s general direction.

“I’d say you deserve it, but,” Legundo says, and lets his head rest against the wall with a dull *thud.* “It’s probably a *me problem* too. I just –”

“You just?”

“I just can’t trust someone if I can’t at least look them in the face when they’re telling me something,” he says slowly, turning over the words in his head before he commits them to sound.

“You know you can solve that problem at any time, right?” Rex huffs. “I mean, I get you’re gonna be paranoid about me either way, but–”

“I do know that, yes,” Legundo says, taking a deep breath in and closing his eyes as he steels himself for what he has to say next. “Day after tomorrow sound good to you?”

Chapter End Notes

> Solar's note: they're gonna go see the giant spider monster, guys! they're gonna go mess with the giant spider monster! aren't you excited? i know i am!! :D
>
> okay, jokes aside: this next arc - and it is going to be a dedicated sub-arc, iykyk - is going to take a great deal of writing coordination from fluffy and i, so we are this time almost definitely for sure going to have to put *bsch* on a temporary hiatus while we write out the entire thing ahead of time. it *will* be back; this is not the Indefinite Hiatus i often pull on other fics, active work will be done, but we might end up skipping an extra Saturday or two while we make sure everything is cohesive and works together. you'll start getting chapters once we start finishing them - depending on how far ahead we can forge, it might even be possible to bump this fic back up to weekly updates (although no promises there).
>
> i'm really excited for where things go from here! as you can probably tell from the general vibes of this chapter and what

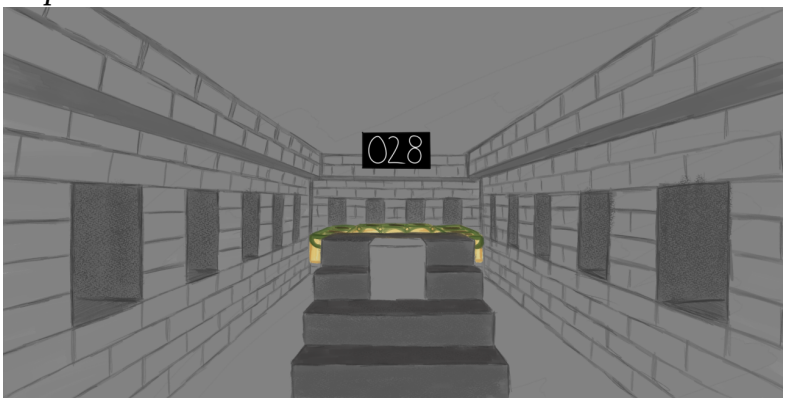
happened last time there was a relatively chill chapter in a solar & fluffy multichapter, *it's all sideways from here.* not downhill. just sideways.

anyway happy pride month. decem has changed their logo to rainbow to support the gays for pride month. let's all ignore the fact that they were already rainbow and make fun of the merchant for doing corporate pride nonsense.
--
Fluffy's note:
watch your horizons

Chapter 18: 028

Chapter Summary

Desperate times…



Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Brief and joking discussion of sapient spiders. Stalking-adjacent implications and brief, intentional physical intimidation. Description of injuries and severe physical violence in combat with a humanoid opponent. Major character death.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You got everything you need yet?”

Legundo looks up from the enchanting table and raises his sword to check the way it gleams in the early morning light. It’s sharper than it was a few days ago, feels a little more lightweight and a little more reliable. “Someone’s anxious.”

“I’m *excited,”* Rex corrects him, busying themself with the brewing stand. They’d made Legundo craft it and insisted he only put blaze powder in when they couldn’t extract it out of the stills, but other than that weird quirk they’ve basically been handling the potions themself over the past day or so. “But I’m also not gonna be able to get through that portal with you, so – yes actually I *am* nervous. Thanks *soooo much* for pointing that out.”

Legundo snorts. “The only thing keeping this from being the most prepared for the dragon fight I’ve ever been is the fact that I didn’t have time to go get Netherite. I don’t even know what you expect me to do with all these potions.”

“Speed for getting the heck out of dodge. Strength for hitting the dragon harder, correct me if I’m wrong but you did say you weren’t the *speedrunner* speedrunner type, so it’s not like you’re using beds. Slow falling you only use if you’re *really* getting knocked around, it’ll cut your movement speed pretty badly. Splash regen and health for – I mean, you can figure that one out on your own.”

“I have,” Legundo says, checking his pockets, “twelve entire golden apples I haven’t used yet. And you’re out here making health potions *why,* exactly?”

“Because, unless you’ve been able to unhinge your jaw like a snake this entire time, splash potions are instant and gapples are not.”

Legundo grimaces. “Thanks for *that* mental image.”

“You’re welcome! Don’t make me get the dandelion stew.” They pause, tilting a bottle of red liquid side to side in the light filtering through the window. *“Actually,* I probably *should* make dandelion stew. You pick up any mushrooms while you were in the Nether?”

Legundo shakes his head, setting the blade back down on the enchanting table and starting to polish it. “I’m not taking *stew* to the dragon fight, Rex. There’s a line between preparing and just being insane.”

The bottle shakes perhaps a little *too* violently at him. “Yeah, well, you’re the preparer and I’m the insane one. That’s my entire *thing,* Legs. Besides, dandelion stew is the *singular best* source of saturation, even better than the golden carrots I *also* happen to specialize in.”

“Rex,” Legundo says, “it’s not my first dragon fight. I promise I’ll be fine – it’s basically habit at this point.”

“Habit *schmabit.* That’s *dangerous.* You let your guard down and start thinking things are gonna go smoothly and that is *exactly* when things are going to go horribly wrong instead because you skipped a key step in your process.” They huff softly.

Legundo flips the blade over, starting to swipe at the other side with his cloth. “You’d rather have a disappointing and boring dragon fight

than an exciting one?" He pauses, tilting his head to the side. "Actually, yeah. I'd want the same."

Rex does their two note hum, and the bottle slips, just by a little, before tilting back and forth. "Yeah, *exciting* and *dangerous* dragon fights are how you get things like *giant spider monsters."*

"Rex. You are going to jinx me. At this rate I'm *going* to run into the giant spider monster, and I *will* curse this stupid running bit of ours before succumbing to its venom."

"Huh." Their voice is flat, lacking in any humor. For a second, Legundo thinks they're just trying to stonewall his joke, but the silence in the cabin feels less awkward and more tense. Like something's just occurred to Rex.

"Rex?"

"Huh," they repeat, voice more strained and a little more high-pitched. "Hey, Legundo? Quick question for you."

"Hate this," Legundo says, gesturing for them to keep talking.

The bottle of health potion waves shakily towards the window they're standing in front of. "What the *hell* is *that thing?"*

Legundo frowns, dropping the cloth on the table and spinning his sword as he readjusts and steadies his grip on it. "Rex, if you *actually* just manifested the giant spider monster outside our house –"

"–That is not a spider." The potion bottle shakes in the direction of the window again. "Legundo that is not a spider. Legundo I would really, really like it to be a spider, trust me on this one. I actively want this thing to be a giant spider monster right now because *that* you can *stab* and *obsidian* you *can't."*

"Very funny," Legundo says, sighing heavily. "But I'm not falling for this one again."

"I didn't build that." Rex's voice has gone past high-pitched into that panicked, frantic tone of theirs that Legundo has, for all he still mistrusts Rex, *never* heard them fake. "You sleepwalk, right? Did you sleep-build that? *Please* tell me you sleep-built this thing, Legs, because it is *weird* and *I don't like it."*

"Okay, Rex?" Legundo says, "You're freaking me out, just a *little."*

“I think I’m entirely justified in freaking out!” Rex squeaks, and the potion bottle slips onto the table as there’s a sharp *thud* against the window from the inside, hard enough to rattle the frame. “Because *that* is freaking me out!”

Legundo switches the grip on his sword, knuckles going white around the hilt. “Are you going to tell me what it is?”

Rex makes an unintelligible sound, and the window rattles again.

Legundo steps towards the window, teeth gritted – not out of any determination or any sort of need to brace himself, just a deep-rooted instinctive tension he’s felt so many times before. It’s this tension that carries him step by step until he’s standing directly in front of the window.

And then he can feel his heart stop in his chest, can feel his knees start to give out under him. Can even feel the way the corner of the table digs into his hands as he clutches it for support.

“Oh, that’s *bad,”* Rex says. Their voice is distant – not like they’ve moved at all, more like Legundo himself isn’t feeling particularly connected to his body at the moment. “That is a *bad* Legundo face. That’s not even *panicking* Legundo, that’s the *just found out one of my friends is possessed by the Void* Legundo face. Legundo, please say something instead of making that face.”

Legundo isn’t entirely sure he’s capable of that. He’s not entirely sure he’s in control of his body – it is a conscious thought to have to breathe, and another to force himself to keep standing.

There’s a quick rattling as Rex bumps into the potion bottles, and Legundo looks down as he becomes dimly aware of their hand covering his, fingers loosely wrapped around his wrist.

“Legs?”

“They’re not supposed to be here yet,” Legundo says, and pushes away from Rex and the table. He’s not sure when his heart started again, but he can hear it in his ears, the sound of roaring blood drowning almost everything else out. “No, I – they’re not supposed to *be here* yet, Rex.”

“Legs, you gotta –”

“No,” Legundo says, the word brittle and freezing on his tongue. He turns on his heel, resists the urge to smash his fist into the wall, and

storms outside, the door left open for the voice to follow. “No, no, *no.*
”

Something leans against Legundo’s shoulder. He freezes, close to whirling around and swinging at them. The pressure increases just enough that he stays still instead, gripping his sword so tightly that he can feel his fingernails digging into the leather wrapped around the hilt.

“So,” the voice says. “That’s them, then.” Legundo can practically feel the way their teeth are gritted, tightly enough that he forces himself to unclench his own jaw to compensate. “I feel like they probably shouldn’t be chasing you out just short of a month here. What’s it mean when they show up early?”

“Nothing good,” Legundo responds, thinking very hard about the tempo his heart is *supposed* to beat at instead of the current pace it’s setting.

“Oh, *yeah,”* the voice says with a two-tone hum – slower and different. They’re not quite in their low register, but they’re clearly trying to force themself into it. “But there’s different *kinds* of bad.”

“Last time this happened, a bunch of people were sent in to kill me.” He keeps his voice as flat as he can – not to try and hide his fear or the way he’s shaking, but just to keep himself in an audible, understandable range, one clear of inflection. “And last time *that* happened, I had a way to avoid them already. I can’t do that again.”

“Wellllllllllll,” the voice says, dragging out the word agonizingly slowly, “isn’t *that* great. One more question – d’you think they can see me, Legs?”

Legundo closes his eyes, unable to turn his head away. “They see a lot. Especially me. I don’t know.”

The voice hums quietly. “I mean… I *am* invisible. *And* intangible. If there’s any kind of thing they *can’t* see–”

Rex breaks off into a high-pitched, frantic giggle that goes on just a bit too long to be anything but a fear response as they lean on Legundo’s shoulder. “–it’s *me!* I’m *sorry,* Legundo, I am *sorry* I’m laughing, but I think we just found their one blind spot! I *don’t* think we can kill that dragon anymore, bud! I think that – *ehe* – think that might just be the *only* thing between *me* and *getting killed!”*

“It’s not funny,” Legundo says, even though he already knows that’s not why they’re laughing.

They drape an arm around his shoulder, still gasping for breath between spurts of erratic laughter. “It’s – *hah* – not! It’s *really* not! And I *don’t* know how I’m going to deal with this one, Legs, I really don’t! Can we go inside? *Let’s go back inside.”*

They tug at his arm insistently. Legundo resists on instinct, just enough that he feels their grip on his arm loosen slightly, and then follows them back into the house, away from the thing on the horizon line.

“So,” Rex says, their breathing heavy. “I thought I had a plan for this. However, given the *awful* vibes from that *thing,* I’m gonna take a *wild* guess and say that plan *might* not work. This, Legs? This is why you should have told me more about them. What are we gonna do *now?”*

Legundo slumps into his seat at the kitchen table, face-down into the wood grain to avoid the painfully cheery light still filtering in through the window. “Why are we both being so calm about this, Rex?”

They giggle frantically again. “Probably because I don’t think it’s possible to get any *more* panicked at this point! It’s like, that thing where you add too much negative to something and it goes into the positives for some reason. You know, the whole – what’s-it-called thing –”

“Stack underflow error,” Legundo says from the table.

“Yes! *That.* Stack underflow error. We’re both panicking so hard we’re calm again. Glad we figured *that* one out! Next question, *how* do we get *you* somewhere *safe?”*

“We don’t,” he says flatly. “We can’t. Nowhere’s safe from here on out. They’re here, and they’re probably focused *directly* on me right now.”

Rex whistles softly. “Great. Great! *Perfect.* Now that we’re both feeling *talkative* about this whole thing, can I *please* get a *name* to go along with the ominous chunk of obsidian in our backyard?”

Legundo lifts his head in one fluid motion, tossing his hands in the air and then to the side in a universal *dunno* gesture. His gaze lands on the windowsill near where Rex’s voice has been coming from, and he slumps further into his seat, swallowing every snarky response he wants to throw at them. Despite his best efforts, they’re *here,* and he

doesn't really have any other choice but to give Rex as much of a chance at survival as he can.

"Yeah," he says, painfully aware of how dry his mouth is. "Yeah, okay. They're not really giving me much other choice, huh?"

Rex giggles in that way of theirs that Legundo is increasingly realizing is entirely a horrible stress response. "Yeah! Yep! *Apparently* so! I mean, sure actually we *could* just *theoretically* ignore the horrible object radiating malice outside our doorstep and I could go on living in *blissful* ignorance, but! I don't think we *actually* can, Legs! I think I kind of *need* to know what's going on!"

Legundo stares at the window and the view beyond it. There's a desperate, pleading edge to Rex's words, one that goes far past the way they normally dig for information. There's no bargain, no deal, no back and forth, none of the *you give me this I'll give you that* patter that Legundo is so used to from them. Just a frantic voice asking – *begging* – Legundo for something.

It almost makes him feel worse.

"They're called Decem," he says, keeping his eyes fixed on the window and the outside beyond. "It's… I *think* they might be a group. Nearest I can tell, most of them want me dead."

Rex goes completely silent – so quiet that for a moment Legundo wonders if they are still there at all, until he hears them lean forward against the back of the chair across from him and he can feel their eyes on him. "That's *interesting,"* they say, their tone even enough that Legundo knows they're picking each word carefully. "Because I've *never* heard of them. Which *kiiiiinda* sucks, since it means I don't know what they're planning. But! But. That's also a *good* thing, because it means *they've* never heard of *me."*

Legundo nods, drumming his fingers intently on the arm of his chair. "Wish I could say the same. I've just been *stuck,"* he says, putting every bit of bitterness he can into that single syllable. "Going between worlds at their whim."

"Huh," Rex says, and the chair tips backwards as they lean harder against it. "Any… *reason?* Rhyme or otherwise?"

Legundo's fingers falter briefly, breaking eye contact with the window as he looks down towards his hands. "I don't know. I just keep ending up different places, and I'm not sure if that's because I keep escaping

them or if that's them repeatedly capturing me. I don't know what they're capable of at this point – or, I don't know the *limits* , I've seen them do all sorts of things."

Rex makes that new two-tone hum, sustaining each one out for more than a few seconds. *"Capturing.* But you said they wanted you dead?"

"Yeah." Legundo grimaces as he raises one hand to his shoulder where it feels like there should still be a bruise. "Usually it's just the world itself, but sometimes there will be people there trying to kill me. One of them showed up in-person once – the Warrior himself tried to put a sword through me a couple worlds back. Probably still have a scar from that one."

Rex's hum grows louder, more intentional, and Legundo can hear their fingers as they start to tap against the table. He stares down at the wood grain, trying and failing to stop his mind from racing.

"So," Rex says. "You know them."

"We've got history," Legundo says. "Not that I know *what* history other than having a general feeling of unease, but I know I don't like them. And the feeling is *clearly* mutual."

"No." He gets the distinct feeling that Rex is shaking their head emphatically. "I mean you *know* them know them. You just told me one of their names or titles or whatever. You know what they look like when they show up in a world – you know signs that will tell you when they're active – you know things that tend to be their fault. *You know them."*

Legundo shrugs helplessly. "I guess. Doesn't feel like it, though. More like I'm looking at a totally blank canvas and every once in a while I can see a hint of something that got painted over."

Rex snorts, a little bit more sharply and defeated-sounding – bitterly? – than normal. They tap their hand against the table with a solid *knock, knock* before going back to drumming their fingers against it. "Yeah. Get in line."

"Pardon?"

"Nothing, just – inside joke." They hum again, more strained this time. "So. So, so, *so.* There are weird multidimensional capital-T Things that control worlds who probably want you specifically dead for some reason. They send you wherever they want and can apparently come

see you in person anytime, and also apparently you know them. Am I getting this right?"

"It sounds a lot less awful than it actually is," Legundo mutters.

Rex snickers, strained and low-pitched. "Most things sound less bad when you summarize them, like, other you wants me dead because I framed a goat for blowing him up, sounds *real* funny out of context, right?"

Legundo squints at the air across from him where he's pretty sure Rex is standing. "I'm not even going to *try* to unpack that," he says. "Other than that, if getting framed for temporary murder – and I *assume* it's temporary, since he's alive to be murderous about it – if someone else getting framed for murdering him was what did it? Then it absolutely *wasn't.* It's just the point at which he lost his cool enough to start letting it slip."

The chair clatters to the ground as Rex puts too much of their weight on it. "Legs, to quote you, *don't like that.* So, *if* you don't *mind,* I'm gonna *change the subject now."*

"Of course you are," Legundo says, rolling his eyes.

Rex doesn't respond directly – they leave their chair fallen over onto the ground and move off into the house, voice a little too loud and echoing off the walls a little too much to make their location easy to discern. "They know you. They – *Decem,* interesting – *know* you, and *you* know *them,* and they can send you wherever they want, *and* they want you dead slash captured slash both, *aaand,* very importantly, *Legundo,"* they say, and Legundo flinches as their voice reappears right back next to him. *"They* haven't gotten what they *want."*

"I don't think they *want* anything," Legundo says, trying very hard not to whirl around towards Rex.

"Everyone wants *something,"* they respond, and the way they say it is… *strange.* In that lower register of theirs, but oddly more stable-sounding – smoother, more authoritative. It feels offputtingly familiar, like there's a piece of peeling paint on his blank canvas that he hadn't noticed before. The voice itself isn't familiar, but that *tone. "Especially* an organization of *very* powerful beings, Legs, that can seemingly do *just about anything they want,* only! *Only,* they *haven't* gotten what they want from *you."*

Their voice is closer, almost directly behind him. "And yet – *and yet,*

your little cycle continues. And *me!* I'm here now, Legundo, and I am *clearly* not supposed to be, but *something* caused me to be here, because I don't randomly worldhop like you do, but something, *something* caused me to be here! *So!"*

Legundo can feel their hands slam down onto the back of his chair with a solid *thump.* "What, *why,* am I *here?* What do *they* want that they *don't have,* Legundo? Come on. You know them. *You know this."*

"Rex –"

"You know this," they repeat with one of those manic, strained giggles. "And you know *me!* Even though you like to *pretend* you don't, you know *them* and you know *me* and *you know this.* So! *Pop quiz!* Why am I here? *Give me an answer."*

Legundo keeps his gaze forward. His nails dig into the grain of the wood, pulling up splinters, until his knuckles go white and his hands are shaking from keeping them so tense.

They're right. He does know them. It's not unreasonable to assume that one of his previous guesses about them had been spot on – that in the same breath, he had been right about both his invisible guest and his stalkers.

Legundo pushes his chair away from the table hard and sudden enough that it falls over backwards, catching partway in the air before falling to the ground the rest of the way. He takes a few steps to the side, swings around to face the table again, and reaches into his inventory.

The ender chest thuds against the table, and Legundo unlatches the lock. He leaves the lid closed, though, sliding to the side and glancing in their direction.

"Now you're catching on," the voice hums, and then giggles. Laughs louder, the half-broken noise compounding into something larger and worse that sets off several of Legundo's most deep-seated *get out of here* alarms. *"Now* you're *catching on!* Oh, *yeah,* no, *this* makes sense."

Legundo seizes up as their hands come down hard on his shoulders, as their nails dig into his jacket slightly. *"I was right,"* they practically snarl. "I was *right.* It isn't about *me* at *all."*

The voice laughs again, keeping one hand on his shoulder as they reach towards the ender chest – or, at least, as something comes up

out of the ender chest, held in an invisible grasp that jitters the same way the hand on his shoulder jitters with pent-up energy. An old, battered-looking book, weathered red leather and loose pages only kept from falling out by the lock on the cover.

"This," the voice says, and something is so *wrong* about the way they sound now, this awful sing-song quality like nothing Legundo has heard from them before. "They want *this,* Legundo, they think it'll solve *all* their problems! So they *pulled* on it, tugged it towards you so that *you'd* find it *for* them. Wonder why *that* is!"

Legundo tries to step away from them, but the unsteady pressure on his shoulder just increases in response, rooting him to the spot. *"Stay there,"* the voice snaps, clear and cold and sharp. The book vanishes, tumbles from their grasp back into the void of the ender chest, and they slide back into that lilting, rhythmic cadence and low tone once more. "I have good news for you, Legundo. I have *great* news for you, Legundo. *They don't know how it works."*

Another one of those half-broken laughs, too loud and going on for too long. "But I *do!* Because they don't *have* the book, Legundo, *but I do!* And it doesn't let go of its owner so easy, oh no, it wants a job *finished,* and that means that where *it* goes…"

The voice trails off, hand slipping away from his shoulder, clearly expecting Legundo to finish their sentence. He clenches his jaw so tightly it hurts and says nothing. Doesn't move towards the door he knows they're already standing in front of.

They sigh. Loud and heavy and deliberate. "Pick up the ender chest," they say. It's not a suggestion. "Just in case it starts whispering to me again."

It hits Legundo, with nearly enough force to make his heart stop again, that he has put something else together. Something that he is *quite* sure of, pieces slotting together far too perfectly for there to be any other answer.

Legundo is very sure of why his other self wants them dead.

And that is because they are a *threat.*

His hand drifts towards the hilt of his sword. The voice snickers, and Legundo hears the quiet sound of the door locking, the *click* of metal just as awful as the sound of snapping bones.

“Pick. Up. The *ender chest,”* they say, each word as sharp as the last. *“Now.”*

Legundo grimaces, dropping his hand past his sword and grabbing his pickaxe from his inventory. The ender chest crumbles into a pile of obsidian across the table, and Legundo scoops the spare pieces into his inventory.

They sigh loudly, audibly enough that Legundo is fairly sure the sound is largely exaggerated for his own benefit.

“So!” Rex says, stifling a significantly more strained giggle than before. “What! Are we going to do *now,* Legundo?”

Legundo can feel his eye twitch. “That’s it? We’re just… moving on from that?”

“Oh, did you *want* me to keep having a breakdown?” Rex says, and the door very noticeably unlocks. “We can go back to that if you want! Trust me, I can go *right* back to freaking out if you’d *prefer* that!”

“That’s not what I meant,” Legundo says, and drags his hand down his face. “I – look, *okay,* we can sideline your whole… *thing* for the time being, because I am *not* ready to get into whatever’s going on with you. But are we really just going to move past the –”

“Volcanic glass with horrendous vibes sitting right outside our house?” Rex interrupts. “Unless you got better ideas, *buddy,* yeah, weeeee’re just gonna ignore the absolute *heck* out of that thing. What can it even do to us, huh? Besides scare us?”

“Do you *really* want me to answer that?” Legundo says.

He can practically hear Rex make a *face* at that, one followed by a much less manic and more nervous giggle. *“Nope!* We’re just gonna have to burn that bridge when we get to it.”

“Hate that,” Legundo says, although it’s more out of instinct than any further discomfort with the situation. Things can’t really get much worse, after all.

“Any other objections before I go diamond mining until we have enough diamonds to take a different pickaxe to every individual block of that thing?” Rex says.

He sighs. “Not really. You want me to work on the build while you go do that?”

Legundo can nearly hear the sheepish grin on Rex’s face. “That’d be *great.* Maybe the face furthest away from the house. You know. For reasons *totally* unrelated to the thing neither of us will be talking about.”

“Sounds great,” Legundo mutters, picking his chair up from the ground and putting it back in its place at the table. There’s a few dents in it from where it had impacted with the floor, but those can probably be buffed out with a little bit of elbow grease.

“Perfect! *Awesome,”* Rex says. “I will see you *tonight,* granted nothing else weird happens – oh, did I just jinx us? You’re the expert in this.”

“I don’t think we can get any more jinxed,” Legundo says, and forces a grim smile to his face. “That said, let me know if you see a giant spider monster while you’re down there?”

A brief moment of silence. Legundo’s grin becomes slightly more forced.

“I *have* just remembered you can’t see me,” Rex says awkwardly, “but I *am* giving you a thumbs-up, if that counts for anything.”

Legundo watches as the unsalvageable chips of obsidian scattered across the table slowly despawn, winking out of existence one after the other. “Yeah, I – yeah. Counts for something.”

Rex doesn’t respond. Legundo glances back towards the door, realizing with a shiver that they’re already gone – he’s aware that their ability to phase through blocks makes for a quick exit, but that awareness doesn’t stop it from being any less jarring when they suddenly vanish.

He’s less alone than he would be with them gone, and he absolutely hates it. The best he can do is glare as spitefully as possible towards the window before turning to their storage chests to fight with whatever block palette Rex had settled on without him. Most of the blocks are probably already outside in separate chests, though, so all Legundo ends up doing is grabbing a few baked potatoes and mustering one last withering glare through the glass before turning his back to the house.

The outside should smell different. He’s always been a little bit disappointed by that particular thing about them – always felt like he

should be able to smell ozone around them, instead of only when it rains. The usually uncanny feeling of being watched has set in, but at this point Legundo's fine with that. It doesn't beat actually being alone with his thoughts, but it *definitely* beats being around Rex after having put that ender chest down. He'll take just about anything after that, even his usual stalkers.

He hikes his way up the unfinished stone walls slowly, noting and correcting a couple of faulty brick placements as he does so, back turned to the horizon. Standing like this makes it easier to ignore the nascent threat behind him, easier to try to focus on building out the next section of the wall.

Legundo squints down at the stone framing below him. Apparently, Rex has seen fit to start him on the entrance area first – not really something he has a problem with, as long as it puts some distance between him and Decem. They've left a good deal of room for what he assumes will probably be a mostly decorative door with some smaller, more functional insets as actual entrances, but building the door would require him to hop back down and go looking for spruce wood.

He'd prefer to keep the high ground for now.

Not thinking about their presence is easier said than done for Legundo. He can try to get lost in building as much as he likes, but no amount of trying not to think about a black sheep will prevent him from thinking about exactly that. Although – he nudges a loose stone brick back into place with one foot – he's not exactly sure if that's the metaphor he'd apply to Decem's presence here. They're more like the cave spiders nesting in the mineshaft somewhere under him right now. If he stands there for too long thinking about what to do with them, he's going to get bit.

Again, that won't stop his mind from wandering.

He should be starting at the bottom. *Why* are they here? Yes, they're following him, and they want whatever that book was – but why *now?* Why so early into the timeline? Whenever they've shown up early before, it's been day one, or at the very least has been some significant-numbered day, a multiple of five or ten. Not – he counts on his fingers, running back over how long it's been – a very arbitrary day twenty-eight.

It can't be in the numbers, unless Rex had somehow managed to miss their presence for three days straight or was a pro at acting like this

was their first time noticing Decem's presence. Probably not, though – it's more likely that something *happened* that brought them here today. Maybe they'd lost track of him and located him again? Maybe the significant intervals were a fluke and they really just do show up whenever they can? Maybe it's because he and Rex were going to kill the dragon today, and that would…

He starts setting out a new layer of stone bricks, shuffling the itemized blocks through his fingers as he walks back and forth across the strip of wall. That's what it is – the dragon. Rex's guesses are usually weirdly spot-on, and this time is probably no exception.

Rex is an unknown variable to Decem, too, and that means they probably want them out of the picture entirely. So of *course* they'd show up the day of the fight – they want to be able to pinpoint Rex's location properly once they become physical, get rid of them as soon as possible.

The next layer goes down, and the one after that, and fairly soon Legundo's thoughts are racing fast enough that he hasn't glanced at the thing watching him in several minutes. Why this morning, when they were spotted? Maybe they'd hoped to have the opposite effect, drive them both to get Rex's body back even quicker, and then be able to intercept them immediately before anything could get in the way.

Legundo's steps grow steadier and more confident as the thirty blocks he's kept pacing across become more and more familiar. He's gotten a lucky break for once. Decem has miscalculated Rex, thought they were stupider or less paranoid, and now all the two of them have to do to thwart Decem's plans is keep Rex nonphysical – keep that weird book in an ender chest inventory they can't access and out of Decem's hands for good.

There's a strange shuddering feeling. The one Legundo associates with Rex dying, only for whatever reason it is *far* worse this time – a lag spike so severe that for a second he wonders if Decem have found some way to break into the world again, or if Rex has somehow taken a pickaxe to the fabric of reality itself in the process of dying. The feeling of vertigo is so bad that he doesn't even realize he's lost his balance until he feels grass under his hands and feet.

Like with any particularly bad instance of lag, Legundo has a couple seconds of completely clear thought where he's back on top of the wall, able to brace himself for exactly how badly this is about to hurt before the pain actually hits.

And then the pain hits.

Legundo bites back a shout as his arms, already braced against the ground where he'd put them out to try and catch himself, finally take the damage they initially took several seconds ago, followed by his legs crumpling from under him again as the rest of him hits ground a second time. He lies there for a few seconds, feeling remarkably like he's just been hurled face-first into an obsidian pillar by the Ender Dragon.

"Ow," he finally manages to vocalize to nobody in particular. He absently raises his hand to his nose, half expecting to find it broken again. He's had worse in other worlds, but that doesn't make this particular chunk of damage hurt any less.

He blinks at his hand – it's dimly lit for some reason. Dusk falls as his eyes adjust just in time for the sun to slip below the horizon for the day. Hadn't it been early afternoon right before he'd fallen? He could swear it was – remembered squinting and shading his eyes against the sun, cupping his hand to block out the object in his peripheral vision.

Legundo keeps staring at his hand, temporarily unable to process everything going on through the pain and confusion. That excuse falls away pretty quick as his leftover saturation takes away the worst of the pain – most notably the broken wrist he's pretty sure he had a few minutes ago – and leaves him lying there. He drops his arm back down to his side, heartbeat dully thudding in the back of his head as he watches the stars wink into existence.

Okay. It's night now. That's probably an issue.

"Ow," he says again, moving to sit up. He checks himself over – nothing feels permanently injured and nothing's hanging limply or poking out from skin where it shouldn't be. That doesn't make it hurt any less, though. He straightens out his legs, drags himself over to the base of the wall, and leans against it for support. Standing's hard on a heart and a half, with or without armor – he considers going for a golden apple just to recover faster, but the house is *right there.* It's probably better to save those for a real emergency.

Legundo glances up again as he hauls himself up the wall and pulls a couple of golden carrots from his inventory, trying to focus on the house in the center of the build. He bites down on one, wincing yet again at the crunching sound the carrot makes, but he'll take that noise over not having anything on his stomach. More saturation

means he might be able to get back unassisted, limping instead of crawling, and then he can get to Rex and ask them what's going on.

The sky's already gone pitch black, he realizes uneasily. Clouds have swept in, and the moon is nowhere in sight. If they're really unlucky, it'll probably start thundering any second now.

He sighs, then closes his eyes and braces himself for the unpleasant feeling of dragging himself across a half-finished wall. When he opens his eyes again, they've landed on a form standing directly in the center of the empty build, between him and the door of the house. He blinks in confusion, still trying to process what he's seeing as he stares down the figure. His heart pounds in his ears, slowly, ever so slowly, raising in volume until it drowns out every other noise, even his heavy breathing.

Legundo realizes just a second too late that the sound he's hearing isn't his heartbeat.

It's static.

Instinct tells him to look away *immediately,* and Legundo snaps his head to the side before realizing the mistake he's just made.

He throws himself forward, legs screaming in protest, barely able to move out of the way as the enderman's fist comes down. There's a cloud of dust as its claws connect; it tears out a chunk of stone, and Legundo almost manages to catch its eyes again before the brick hits him in the chest.

Legundo can hear and feel the *crack* as one of his ribs snaps, and he crumples against the wall, doubling over in pain. He can hear rather than see the enderman moving in for another attack – the best he can do to put distance between them is drop to the ground and try to roll out of the way. His knees buckle under the sudden motion forward and he hits the dirt harder than he'd meant to.

There's a sharp feeling on his tongue as the taste of copper fills his mouth. Not something he can worry about right now. He spits a glob of blood to the side as the enderman teleports directly over him.

His entire body screams in pain as he flips himself over, trying to roll further to the side. The enderman swipes at him before he's able to orient himself again, and he's only barely able to avoid it in time. It's hunched over him like a feral animal, mouth even wider than it should be, jaw more dislocated than distended.

It lunges as if trying to take a bite out of him, and Legundo throws his hands up. He barely catches it – one hand on the lower jaw, one splayed out over its eyes. It screams at him, trying to force its mouth closed to bite off his fingers, and he screams back as the adrenaline kicks in. He throws a knee up to catch the enderman in the chest, and it draws back just enough for him to shove its face to the side. The momentum of its lunge gives him just enough extra leverage to slam its head into the ground, buying him precious time to force himself up on his feet.

Everything hurts – hasn't stopped hurting, really – but he can't afford to focus on how much pain he's in right now. He stumbles to his feet and draws his sword as the enderman recovers, pitching forward unsteadily before righting itself. Legundo takes a step back towards the house, and then another, not breaking line of sight with the enderman.

"Rex!" he yells hoarsely, trying to keep the enderman in his peripheral vision as he backs away. He's not sure if his voice is going to carry that far, but even a long shot is better than the odds he's currently facing.

He turns his head slightly too far, and the enderman lunges for him again.

Legundo swings wide with his sword as he sidesteps the enderman's outstretched claws, jumping back with a yelp as it pivots on its heel and swipes at him again. Its hands curl around the edge of his sword, and Legundo could swear the enderman *grins* at him as it yanks the sword out of his hand, shedding purple particles the entire time.

"Hey!" Legundo shouts as it tosses the sword aside. *"Hey!* Come on, that *can't* be vanilla!"

It hisses at him, and he ducks under the swipe it aims for his face before grabbing its wrist on his way back up. If it's not going to play fair, neither is he – and if it's humanoid, he should still be able to damage it roughly the same.

He stomps down on its foot, trying to use its momentum against it once again to snap its wrist in the same motion. He doesn't quite get the *crack* of breaking bone he's looking for, but the enderman screams loud enough for him to know it hurts before swiping at him with its other hand. He moves aside just slightly too late, and the blow catches him in the shoulder. Legundo lets go, stepping back towards his sword

while glaring at it the entire time before freezing in place as it teleports again.

He braces himself, but the purple particles it's been shedding seem to be trailing away rather than behind him, which means he at least has enough time to reach down and grab his sword again. He eyes the area around him warily as his hand closes around the hilt of the sword.

If it's smart enough to disarm him, it's smart enough to come back to finish the job. This is far from over. He rummages through his inventory with his free hand as silence falls over the area, grabbing a golden apple. Better to waste gold than to die a loot gremlin.

The night is far too quiet. No other mobs, no wind, just Legundo and his heartbeat. He allows himself a glance towards the house as he opens his mouth to bite down –

– *Vwoop.*

Legundo drops the apple and raises his sword as the enderman falls on top of him in what feels like slow-motion. It's glaring at him, staring full-force directly into his face, and all Legundo can hear is static and screaming. He barely manages to force his sword into position in time as he buckles under the enderman's full weight, back slamming into the ground as it lunges – and impales itself on the diamond sword mouth-first, tip of the sword driving straight through the back of its head.

There's no way this doesn't kill it. Legundo barely registers the pain of impact, more relieved than anything else – he may limp out of this fight on half a heart, but he's going to be alive and the enderman will be *dead.*

He waits for the sound of its deathrattle. The furious static only grows. The enderman's eyes glint bright purple, full of fury and not glazed over in the slightest. Legundo does his best to push himself up, shove the sword further through, deal that last tick of damage.

Instead, all he can do is watch in horror as it *bites down* on his diamond sword and shatters the blade into pieces.

It snarls at him, teeth covered in its own blood, and spits out the pieces in its mouth. Legundo yells something he's pretty sure would be a *not fair* if he could verbalize right now and does his best to force the jagged edge of his broken sword into the thing's chest, as far up to the

hilt as he can get it. He's pretty sure it breaks skin. *Something* warm drips down his hand.

The enderman doesn't seem to care. It raises its hand, and Legundo can feel –

– ? –

– can feel –

– *"Legundo!"* someone yells from what feels like hundreds of blocks away –

– looks down at his chest, at the black claws embedded directly into his heart –

– gasps for breath, starts choking on blood –

– *"Rex,"* he wheezes, and the enderman grins at him as its claws sink deeper, and Legundo can feel himself

(...)

die.

Chapter End Notes

Solar's note: ...yeah, it was never going to be that easy.

anyway, we're back! kinda! we're on an "updates whenever we feel satisfied with what we have" schedule now. fluffy got a job. i picked a college major. we're like 80% busier than we used to be. life goes on.

we'll see you soon. hope this solid *chunk* of an update makes for a good bit to chew on.
--
Fluffy's note:
White, G2 to G4.

Chapter 19: 028

Chapter Summary

Desperate times…

Chapter Notes

To view the chapter art as a stand-alone post, click here.

Additional warnings:

Brief repetition-based unreality. Physical violence in combat with a humanoid opponent. Semi-detailed description of third-degree burns. Major character death.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“We're not going to the End,” Rex says.

Legundo looks up from the enchanting table and raises his sword to check the way it gleams in the early morning light. It’s sharper than it was a few days ago, feels a little more lightweight and a little more reliable. “Someone’s anxious.”

It takes a second for Rex’s words to actually process. *Anxious* would be Rex bugging him about doing more prep work, like they were yesterday. This – this out-of-nowhere declaration – is completely out of character for them.

He looks over towards the brewing stand, expecting to see a bottle hanging in the air. They’d been brewing potions like mad yesterday – had told him to craft it himself and insisted he only put blaze powder

in when they couldn't extract it out of the stills, but other than that weird quirk there was no sign of anything amiss yesterday.

There's no floating bottle now, though. Something about that seems a bit incorrect to Legundo, but it's the least of his concerns considering Rex's weird behavior.

"We're not going to the End," they repeat, and Legundo feels that gnawing sensation in the pit of his stomach begin to grow in size slowly. He glances out the window, looking for any sign of trouble that could explain this behavior, and finds none.

The deep-rooted instinctive tension in his bones doesn't subside. The view out there is picturesque, rays of sun filtering through the mountains and striking the small cliffside above the house, but there's also a strange patch of bare dirt up on that cliffside like Rex has been… building? Moving something? Whatever it is, he's *certain* it wasn't like that yesterday.

He turns back to Rex. "Where have you been all morning?"

"Busy," They respond flatly. "Not the point. The point is that *we're not going to the End."*

"You're being weird," Legundo says.

"Yeah. Anyway. Quick aside. *How certain* are you that you have never, *ever* died in a world? Remind me just one more time."

Legundo pokes the edge of his sword with the flat of one finger, too soft to break skin but hard enough that he can feel the sharpened edge at his fingertips. "That's the sort of thing I'd remember, so – I'd say I'm pretty certain. What's gotten into you this time?"

Rex makes an *mmMMM* sort of anxious humming sound. *"Ffunnn.* That's fun. That's *fun* and *really* just – *super* awesome, Legs! *Great* to know. You've *never* died. Cool. Very skilled of you. We're still not going to the End."

Legundo lowers his sword just a little, resisting the urge to step away from Rex and towards the counter. To say something isn't right here would be too obvious – he's felt a little off-balance since he first woke up this morning, and it's on a level a lot deeper than whatever Rex is panicking about.

"I have," Legundo says, checking his pockets with his free hand,

“twelve entire golden apples I haven’t used yet. You were making potions the last time I saw you – which, seriously, *where* have you *been* all morning?”

Rex takes a breath in, and Legundo can feel the gears turning in their head, probably already spinning up some sort of half-truth about the issue of the day. He forces himself to breathe as well – holds his hand up in a *pause* motion and closes his eyes, steadying himself.

“Okay. Look, Rex,” he says, trying to ignore the fact that he can tell they’re staring at him even harder than usual. “Since *day one,* you have been asking me to kill that dragon so you can ‘have your body back.’ That has been the *one* thing you have been bugging me to do over and over. And now we are *finally* going – against my better judgment I am doing *exactly* what you wanted me to – and not even 24 hours later you come back and go *no, actually, let’s not do that.* What is going *on* with you? How do you expect me to *not* be weirded out by this?”

“You’re freaked out,” Rex huffs, “how d’you think *I* feel? Think with your *brain* for a sec, Legs, would I *really* just go back on something that I *still really want* for absolutely *no* reason?”

“Yes. Yes you would.”

They sigh shakily. *“No,* Legundo. I wouldn’t be going back on what I want from you if it wasn’t *dire,* okay? We are *not* going to the End. We *can’t* go to the End. If you go to the End, we both die, that’s it, end of story. Happy now? Can we move on?”

Legundo flips his sword back around in his hands, raising it slightly. “No. Absolutely not. You’re not telling me something.”

“We literally went over this ye– *two days* ago!” Rex wheezes in frustration. “That's correct! I am! Because that isn’t part of our deal! And I'm not pestering *you* for information right now, so just *trust* me when I say we *can’t* go to the End anymore, *okay?”*

“What,” Legundo says dryly, “are all the stronghold portals rigged to explode or something?”

“No!” Rex snaps with a fury that surprises both of them, judging by the awkward pause for a few seconds after. “Okay. Well. I haven't checked or anything, so maybe they are, who knows. That’s not the *main* reason why.”

“Then what *is?”* Legundo says, tapping his sword against his shoulder impatiently. “Because I’m going to need a *really* good reason to abandon something we’ve done this much prep work for.”

“I…” Rex’s sigh is still shaky, but it’s heavier this time, almost defeated-sounding. “I don’t *have* a good reason, Legs. I’m sorry. I don’t. That’s why I need you to trust me, because if I actually try to explain it, you’re gonna get mad at me halfway through.”

Legundo presses his tongue against the back of his teeth and stares out the window again, half expecting something to have changed. The sunlight outside is still obnoxiously cheery, almost to the point of being grating, and it feels like – given the mood right now – there should be *some* kind of dark cloud outside, some tainted quality to the weather to cause this kind of disconnect.

“Do you know how *infuriating* that is?” he finally responds. “I – no, you *don’t,* do you? You *don’t* get what that sounds like to me, unless you’re trying to make it *impossible* for me to trust you.”

There’s another sigh, then the whisper of feet shuffling against the floor. Legundo snaps his head around to look towards the noise – towards where Rex is standing. Something feels tight beneath his skin, like the shadow of his paranoia has become solid and started digging into his head enough to give him a stress headache. There is very little Legundo can be certain of, but right now one of those things is that something is *wrong.*

“I don’t want to hear any of it,” he continues, grip so tight on the hilt of his sword that it feels like it’s becoming part of his hand. “Nothing about *our bargain,* nothing about it’s for *my safety* or *my own good.* Because you know what, Rex?”

Rex makes a sound, an intake of breath like they’re about to answer that question. Legundo steps closer until he’s sure they’re only one stride away from him. “I was *right* when I felt like you dying was inevitable, and now? I might *want* to trust you, Rex, but you betraying me is feeling pretty inevitable right about now, and I don’t think I can *afford* to be right again. You’re making it *impossible* to–”

“*MmmmmMMMRRRRGH!”* Rex says, and Legundo feels a glancing blow against one shoulder as they smack him, not too hard to hurt but hard enough that he can tell they’re frustrated. *“You* are impossible! I am *trying* to help you! I have done *nothing* but try to help you and you *know* that! Day four! You *asked* me, and you *know* I told you the truth!

You already *know* I'm not working for Decem!"

Silence falls over the cabin, over the half-finished skeleton of the cathedral walls beyond. Legundo steps away slightly, bracing his back foot against the wood flooring as he levels his sword in their direction.

"I didn't tell you that name."

Rex stays quiet.

"Rex," Legundo repeats. *"I didn't tell you that name."*

They laugh weakly, entirely nerves with no mania left. "Yeah, uh," Rex stammers, "can we – can we pretend I didn't say that? Because that *kinda* has to do with the whole 'getting mad halfway through' thing I was talking about earlier, and–"

Legundo swings his sword upwards in a wide arc, blood roaring in his ears, and Rex makes a pained noise as the blow connects.

"Legundo!" Rex gasps, nerves giving way to panic. "You can't just – I can *explain!* You *did* tell me their name, I *swear,* it's just that–"

He slashes downwards in the other direction, knocking over one of the brewing stands. Empty potion bottles smash to the ground as he presses forward, likely backing Rex into the countertop in the process. "Keep talking. That way I know where you are."

"Legs, come *on!"* Rex says, and if Legundo's head was clearer he might be swayed by the pleading edge to their tone. *"Listen!* You just muttered it in your sleep, that's all! I didn't do anything else besides put two and two together! Don't – *ow,* watch where you *point* that thing! – blame me for–"

"I don't sleepwalk," Legundo snarls, and brings his sword down into the counter. The world hitches, a brief but *satisfying* spike that tells him everything he needs to know as he yanks his sword out of where it's embedded into the wood countertop. Uneasy silence falls over the cabin yet again.

"I'm *sorry,* Legundo," Rex says quietly from somewhere behind him. "Can you at *least* believe me when I say *that?"*

Legundo lets out a deep, angry breath, trying to will his hands to stop shaking with rage. "Yeah. I can."

“Great! So now can we *please* sit down and–”

“–And that’s why I’m not wasting my time killing you again,” he adds, grabbing a final bit of cooked mutton from the furnace and wrenching the door open so hard it rattles on its hinges. “I’ve got a dragon to deal with first.”

He sheathes his sword and fishes out an eye of ender in the same motion. The eye soars out along the angle of the sunlight, towards the small cliff face past the house, and Legundo can’t help but feel a vague sense of dread as it shatters with a soft *ping.* It feels wrong, going outside like this. Rex should be by his side instead of against him, or something else should be happening. He shouldn’t have to do this.

Legundo shakes his head, plants his feet in the dirt, and breaks into a full-tilt sprint along a path he knows all too well by now. He’s fully braced for impact as he launches himself off the low cliff and towards the tree branches he knows are underneath.

Staying unseen isn’t a concern for him right now – Rex already knows exactly where he’s headed. He sticks to the treetops, springboarding off the branches to propel himself forward. He heads for the same small gap marking out the river he’d stumbled through on his first run through this forest; the bank is low enough that he’s able to jump from his perch on the trees clear to the other side. Legundo winces as he hears something crunch in his ankles on impact, but he pulls a golden apple out of his pocket and just keeps going – takes a bite out of it as he clambers up the rest of the bank and into the flatter ground at the edge of the forest. He’s overprepared for the dragon fight – he might as well use some of those excess resources to keep himself alive and moving.

Something about that thought feels off, but it’ll take more than deja vu to slow him down. He keeps up his pace across the plains, then into the spruce forest and straight through the abandoned village, not bothering to check for any exact landmarks. He knows roughly where he’s going, and he also knows approximately how long it’ll take him at a full sprint before he needs to throw a second eye.

Legundo ducks through more low-hanging spruce branches as he clears the town and dives headfirst into the lake behind it without a second thought. His clothes will be wet for the rest of the run, but at the pace he’s making the most that’ll do is help keep him cool for the rest of the trip.

He pulls his glasses off his face and tucks them into one hand in a single fluid, practiced motion before carving through the water as fast as he can. He's never been the *fastest* swimmer, but he's a steady one. Before long, he's made it clear across the lake and is tearing at a piece of mutton with his teeth, trying to down it as fast as possible. He shakes the water off his glasses, checking his trajectory again. He's moved a little off-kilter, and he reorients himself as he shifts his stance in the sandbank and breaks into a dash once more.

Scenery flies by fast without Legundo paying much attention to it. At some point, the grass under his feet turns to a mix of coarse dirt and podzol around when the tree branches stop getting in his way, but he only barely registers *huh, old growth taiga* when he has to kick sideways off a block of mossy cobblestone to avoid sprinting face-first into the boulder.

Legundo pauses – just for a brief second – as he spots a ravine ahead and just barely manages to stop himself before he barrels off the edge. The thoughts he's been avoiding click back into focus – *Rex knows their name. I didn't tell them that.* – and he takes a few steps backwards before launching out into the empty air for a low stone shelf towards the lip of the ravine. Gravel crumbles under his feet, and he hastily grabs for the top of the ravine and sinks his nails into the soil as he hoists himself upwards.

The thoughts aren't leaving him now. How *does* Rex know about Decem, anyway?

He shakes his head as if that'll clear it, trying to refocus and regain his momentum at a slightly slower pace. Rex still might get to the stronghold first, but that's probably all they can do to him – they'll still just want to *talk,* and even though Legundo will probably hate every word out of their mouth, that fact will work to his advantage. He'll just have to get them talking and get the eyes into the portal while they're distracted. It's somewhat underhanded, but Rex is hiding pretty much *everything* from him – and if Legundo wants answers, he's just going to have to play dirty if that's what it takes to get them.

It'd be so much easier if he just knew *how* Rex knew that name. He's still pretty sure they were telling the truth about not working for Decem, and his intuition certainly backs that up. Rex is too haphazard and unpredictable to make a good agent of theirs, both too smart and too foolhardy to be useful.

He's also had this breakdown before, though, and just because Rex

isn't working for Decem doesn't mean their motives and goals are any more known. The fact that they know that name *now* and didn't *before* gnaws at him. Somehow, Rex knows their name. *Somehow,* despite the fact that he can't have told them, and they won't even tell him *how* they know that name.

The eye of ender in his offhand twitches slightly, and Legundo slows his run to a jog as he tosses it into the air. He pivots on his heel as it drifts over his shoulder a short distance and immediately shatters against the ground. There's a cave entrance nearby, but that'll take too long – instead, Legundo grabs a shovel from his inventory, and starts digging.

It's boring work, mining a two-by-one tunnel straight down, but Legundo doesn't really have the time to make it interesting. His hands are occupied by the need to keep moving, and his head's busy ping-ponging around the fact that Rex knows the name *Decem* somehow to focus on anything else, or even really process the emotion that comes with it other than being hurt by what feels like a betrayal.

He's not sure *why* it feels like a betrayal. Rex backstabbing him somehow never stopped feeling inevitable, so he's not surprised that it's *happened* – it's just the *way* it's happened that he's stuck on. He can't even bring himself to feel angry at this point, just resigned and annoyed at that resignation.

Legundo's pickaxe hits stone brick, then cleaves right through the infested stone and sends him tumbling down the staircase into the stronghold. He winces, stands back up, and stabs the offending silverfish with his sword before it can cause any more problems for him.

Standing here doesn't feel *real,* somehow. It feels wrong, almost like he's not meant to be here yet, like there's some huge piece of the puzzle he's missing. He checks his inventory to make sure he hasn't forgotten anything, but everything's there – water buckets, potions, bow and arrow, more eyes of ender than it takes to fill out a stronghold portal.

He and Rex had discussed this yesterday, that the portal probably wouldn't have any eyes in it knowing their luck. Rex had snorted and reminded him to make extra just in case every single eye shattered on the way to the stronghold.

And they had. Every single one had, and – as Legundo turns the

corner into a surprisingly nearby portal room – Rex had been right about the empty portal frame as well. He grits his teeth and struggles with the urge to call it another lie on their part. If they'd actually been to the stronghold ahead of time, they would've done something to hide the portal room instead of just leaving it open and accessible.

Legundo snaps out of it when he realizes the silverfish spawner has lit up - and yeah, there's no way Rex would leave that hanging around. He splits one in half with his sword and steps on the other, then shatters the cage with his pickaxe as he comes up the steps.

The first eye slides into frame, locking itself into place with that familiar *ping.* Legundo releases a breath he didn't realize he had been holding. He almost wasn't sure it would work - that something would blow up in his face, that the portal would vanish, that *something* would go wrong. But he completes the far side of the portal and that worry starts to fade, the remnants bleeding into a sense of assured calm.

He doesn't even jump when Rex starts to talk.

"You *really* do not want to do this, Legundo."

"I really think I do," Legundo says, and slots another three eyes in, as fast as he can. "And I also really think that I'm going to have to kill you again if you try and stop me."

"You can always *reconsider!"* Rex says, and Legundo is ever-so-slightly thrown off by how serious they sound, by the complete lack of mania in their voice. "Please. You *have* to reconsider this."

It would be so much easier if Rex didn't sound like they were telling the truth right now. If Rex didn't sound on the verge of total panic and little else. Legundo pushes through it anyway. "I'm not going to," he says.

"But it's –"

"–Risky? Dangerous? Unknown territory?" Legundo raises an eyebrow, setting down another eye. "Nothing new. But do you know what *actually* changes if I kill that dragon, Rex?"

He sets down another eye.

"It takes away your advantage."

There's a long silence. Rex's voice, when they speak again, is further

from Legundo – on the other side of the portal.

“Don’t make me do this, Legs.”

He’s getting tired of that. That annoying attitude from Rex, the whole thing they do about knowing better than he does. “Do *what?* Rex, there is *nothing* you can say or do to stop me from opening this portal right now.”

“There is *one* thing,” Rex says, voice quiet. “But I don’t want to do it. So, last call, step away from the portal. *Please don’t make me do it.”*

Legundo grits his teeth. It’s not *the* voice. Somehow, it’s so much worse than that, because there is a fraction of something truthful in there. Whoever Rex is, whatever they’re doing here, part of them *doesn’t* want to hurt Legundo.

It’ll at least make it easy to get the first hit in.

He places another eye in. Three left, all under Rex’s feet.

“Do what you need to do,” he snaps at them, and reaches out as far as he can to get those last eyes in.

Rex takes a step – Legundo can hear their foot come down solidly on the frame, barely gentler than a stomp. He goes low, sliding an eye into the first frame, and is reaching for the second when a hand closes around the front of his shirt.

Legundo drops the eye – hoping it will roll into place – and turns towards Rex, sword in hand. Rex has already pulled this move before, and he’s in a lot better of a tactical position this time – sword drawn, both his hands free. He braces himself to lunge, and –

– realizes too late that Rex isn’t doing the same thing they did last time.

Logically, Legundo knows that lava is hot. It’s a basic statement of fact, of reason, that lava is dangerous, and it is dangerous because it is *hot.* It burns through everything, with no regard as to what it is destroying.

Physically, Legundo just feels *cold.* There’s a moment of shock as the freeze hits him, where his pain receptors have to do a double take. He’s pretty sure they’re entirely overloaded, and that’s why he can’t *feel* anything, but he still stands still in the one block deep pool for a

second too long, trying to comprehend what has happened. What is still happening.

It only hits him after he's taken his first tick of damage that he's *burning.* He can't feel his legs, but he still throws himself towards the edge of the portal, fingers gripping the edge of it to try and pull himself up and out of the pit. He can't hear anything beyond the sound of his heartbeat in his ears, can't *smell* anything beyond the smell of burning flesh, and his grip is weak, but he still manages to pull himself out, just enough that his muscles start to scream at him.

And there's a pressure against his face, something he barely registers as a shoe, and it's pushing him back *down,* and *oh,* he *can* feel pain. He starts to yell something at Rex, just the hint of a sound, and the pain doubles as his head goes under.

Lava pools in the back of his throat, and Legundo is doing his best to *scream,* to show he's in any amount of pain that will make it *stop.* His hand comes up against his will and weakly smacks against the foot holding his shoulders down, and it shifts ever so slightly, just enough to let him come back up.

Not like it does him much good – the lava is burning through his throat and into the rest of his body. *Air* feels pretty redundant. Legundo still gasps for breath, trying to focus on a face that isn't there, trying to see Rex.

Because *here's* what they're really like. Beyond all their talk of wanting to *help,* of looking out for him, here's what they are now when he does something they don't want.

He can still hear his frenzied heartbeat in his ears, but there's another sound now. Something softer, almost impossible to hear, something that almost doesn't register at all from how out-of-place it feels.

"I'm *sorry,"* Rex repeats, strained and desperate, and then the lava covers Legundo's head again.

He's not sure how long –

– he's just *cold* –

– still apologizing –

– the lava burns through his chest and he can feel himself

(…?)

die.

Chapter End Notes

Solar's note: ...yeah, it was never going to be that easy.

is what i said about getting to the End. now i'm also saying it about trying to pick up a double major. and about writing this fic. somehow i also decided to try and run like 4 ttrpg sessions in a row? i'm very tired. love you all, please leave comments, next update is coming when it's done
--
Fluffy's note:
Black, E7 to E6.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!